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AUTHOR Tossey, Marvin G.; Whitford, Ellen V.
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ABSTRACT

The Dorchester County Even Start Program follows the model for the National Even Start Program and provides an interdisciplinary approach planned to develop a supportive environment conducive to the improved literacy of parents and their children. Participant families of the Even Start Program must consist of at least one parent who is 16 years of age or older, has not completed high school, and has a child between the ages of birth and 7 years. An evaluation of the Dorchester County program compared data from: (1) participants in the local program; (2) all of the families participating in the Even Start Program nationwide; and (3) a comparison group consisting of residents who were eligible for the program but who did not participate. The purpose of the evaluation was to address the following questions or issues: (1) To what degree has the program met its objectives?; (2) To what extent has the program provided support or influenced families in ways beyond the specific objectives?; (3) To what degree has the program met its objectives as perceived by the participants; and (4) How is the program viewed by the human service and educational community? Evaluation of test scores, review of participant interviews and journals, and testimonies from staff members of other programs indicated that the Dorchester County Even Start Program has been successful. (SW)

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EVALUATION 1992-1993 1993-1994

DORCHESTER COUNTY EVEN START PROGRAM

Prepared for:
Dorchester County Board of Education
Cambridge, Maryland

Prepared by:
Marvin G. Tossey, Ph.D.
and
Ellen V. Whitford, Ed.D.

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DORCHESTER COUNTY EVEN START PROGRAM EVALUATION

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW

National Even Start

Even Start is a national program intended to improve family literacy. The Even Start program represents a combination of programs for adult basic education, parent education, and early childhood education. This federal initiative is planned to address the literacy crisis in the nation through an integrative approach to adult and early childhood education. Focusing on parents and children as a family unit, Even Start has three integrated goals:

- * to help parents become full partners in the education of their children;
- * to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners; and
- * to provide literacy training for their parents.

The Dorchester County Even Start Program

The Even Start Program in Dorchester County follows the program model of the National Even Start Program and has served the local community since the 1989-1990 academic year. It provides an interdisciplinary approach planned to develop a supportive environment conducive to the improved literacy of parents and their children.

Population

To be eligible to participate in the Even Start Program,

families must consist of at least one adult parent who is 16 years of age or older, has not completed high school, and has a child (or children) between the ages of birth and seven years.

There are three groups of families discussed in this evaluation: participants in the Dorchester County Even Start Program, aggregated data on all the families participating in the Even Start Program nationwide, and a comparison group which was made up of Dorchester County residents who were eligible for the program but who did not participate. Tables 1 through 7 present a comparison of some general demographic characteristics of these three groups. Table 1 presents data on the number of adults in each family; Table 2 identifies the number of children in family; Table 3 shows family structure; Table 4 illustrates the primary source of financial support for each family; Table 5 presents family incomes; Table 6 identifies the adult participants by gender, and Table 7 identifies the adult participants by race.

The comparison group of twenty-two families was formed in the fall of 1992 to serve as a control group for this evaluation. The comparison group families were selected from families identified for Even Start, who would qualify for the program, but who are not participating. As a comparison of data in the tables shows, the population of the Dorchester County Even Start program more closely approximates that of the local comparison group used in this evaluation than the National Even Start population. The two Dorchester County groups are similar in family structure, income level, source of income, as well as race and gender.

As these tables illustrate, participants in the Dorchester County Even Start Program differ from the National Even Start population in the areas of family composition, income, and race. The Dorchester County Even Start participants are primarily single parent families (77%) who rely predominately (93.2%) on Government Assistance as the primary source of financial support. Of these families, 72% have a yearly income of less than \$5,000. The composition of the group is 85.4% Black and 90.7% female; 72% of the adults are the only adult in the family. Based upon a comparison of these characteristics as illustrated in Tables 1 through 7, it is reasonable to conclude that the families who participate in the Dorchester County Even Start Program are at a greater disadvantage than the National Even Start population. These economically disadvantaged, single-parent families face significant obstacles which may limit the degree to which they may achieve success in the Even Start Program.

Table 1

Characteristics of Even Start Families
Number of Adults 18 and Over in the Family

Adults	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
One	34.9%	72.7%	73%
Two	52.3%	18.2%	23%
Three	7.2%	6.8%	0%
Four	3.1%	0.0%	4%
Five	.9%	0.0%	0%
Six+	.5%	0.0%	0%

Table 2

Characteristics of Even Start Families
Number of Children in Family

# Children	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
One	20.8%	23.3%	18.0%
Two	34.5%	37.2%	23.0%
Three	25.2%	27.9%	32.0%
Four	11.9%	7.0%	22.0%
Five	4.6%	2.3%	0.0%
Six+	3.0%	2.3%	5.0%

Table 3

Characteristics of Even Start Families
Family Structure

Structure	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Single Parent	38.2%	79.5%	77%
Couple	49.2%	9.1%	5%
Extnded Family	11.3%	11.4%	18%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0%

Table 4

Characteristics of Even Start Families
Primary Source of Financial Support

Source	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Job Wages	48.1%	6.8%	27%
Gov't. Asst.	50.7%	93.2%	73%
Alimony	2.6%	2.3%	0%
Other	4.1%	0.0%	0%

Table 5

Characteristics of Even Start Families
Range of Family Income

Range	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Under \$5,000	39.2%	72.1%	77.0%
\$5,000-10,000	29.2%	23.3%	18.0%
\$10,000-15,000	16.6%	0.0%	0.0%
\$15,000-20,000	7.7%	4.7%	5.0%
\$20,000+	7.5%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 6

Characteristics of Even Start Families
by Gender of Adult Participant

Gender	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Female	80.3%	90.7%	95%
Male	19.7%	9.3%	5%

Table 7
Characteristics of Even Start Families
by Race

Race	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Black	26.5%	85.4%	91%
White	46.2%	12.5%	9%
Hispanic	18.5%	2.1%	0%

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the impact of the Even Start program on its participants and the community. The evaluation will examine how well the Even Start program has met its stated objectives as well as how the program has provided additional support for the families and the community. The evaluation report is structured around four issues or questions:

- I. To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start program met its objectives as specified in the grant?
- II. To what extent has the Even Start program provided support or influenced families in ways beyond the specific objectives?
- III. To what degree has the Even Start program met its objectives as perceived by the participants?
- IV. How is the Even Start program viewed by the human service and educational community?

EVALUATION QUESTION I

To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program met its objectives as specified in the grant?

A. Adult Component

Objective 1. The educational level of the project parents will be raised through regular participation in Adult Basic education classes.

To assess the effectiveness of the adult education and child school readiness components of the program, a rigorous quasi-experimental evaluation was implemented during the 1992-93 academic year. Data were collected at the beginning and the end of the year from the Even Start family participants as well as the comparison group.

The adults were given the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) to measure the educational level of the parents. The children were given the Pre School Inventory (PSI) and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R).

Both the comparison group and the adult Even Start participants were given the CASAS in September (pretest) and in April (posttest). The pretest scale score average for the Even Start participants was 230, and for the comparison group was 226.27. The difference can be explained by the fact that many of the Even Start participants were returning students and had previous Adult

Basic Education in the program. The comparison group scores closely reflect the profile of the national pretest scale scores. This comparison is illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8
Distribution of CASAS Pretest Scale Scores
of Comparison Group and National Norms

<u>Functional Level</u>	<u>Percent at Pretest</u>	
	<u>National Norm</u>	<u>Comparison Group</u>
under 200	4	0
200-214	8	11.1
215-225	17	16.7
225 or above	71	72.2
	100	100

The posttest scores were 235.14 for the Even Start participants and 222.77 for the comparison group. This represents a gain of 5.14 points for the program participants and an actual reduction of -3.5 points for the comparison group. These data are illustrated on Table 9. The 5.14 point gain for the program group is 1.48 scale points higher than the overall average gain of 3.66 scale points for adults with 70 or more hours of adult education reported by Even Start programs nationwide. The higher than average gain in CASAS scores and the actual decrease in the comparison group reflects on the quality of the Adult Education component of the Even Start program.

Table 9
Comparison of CASAS Pretest and Posttest Scores
for Dorchester County Even Start and Local Comparison Group

Test	Mean Score	
	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Pretest	230.00	226.27
Posttest	235.14	222.77
Differences	+5.14	-3.50

In addition to achieving measurable gains on the CASAS, adults have realized additional academic success. During the past two years, ten of the Dorchester County Even Start participants achieved passing scores on the GED. Thirty-three percent of the total number of participants in the program since 1990 have gone on to further training, including attending the local Community College. This supporting data gives further evidence of the academic success of the participants and demonstrates that the program is meeting its objective of increasing the academic level of its participants.

Objective 2. The skills and knowledge needed to become employed or to pursue further training will be acquired by project parents through regular participation in Multi-Service Community Center Career/Vocational - planned activities.

To measure this objective a 19-item scale was developed to measure the knowledge and skills needed to become employed. The Employability Orientation/Skills Inventory was given to each Even Start participant in September and again in April to measure changes in employability factors.

The scale scores can range from 0 - 57. The mean pretest score was 26.33. On the posttest the mean for all program participants was 41.89 or a nearly 60% increase. The effectiveness of the program in increasing these scores is much more striking if one compares regular program participants with those with less regular attendance. The mean posttest score for regular participants was 45.57 while the mean score for less regular participants was 30.0, a difference of more than 15 points. These data are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10
**Comparison of Pre and Post Mean Employability Orientation/
Skills Serves by Program Participation**

Test	Participation Level	
	High	Irregular
Pre	27.86	23.28
Post	45.57	30.0

These data suggest that there is some improvement for all participants but the amount is far greater for those with high

levels of involvement. The program would appear to be meeting its objective to improve the skills and knowledge needed to become employed.

B. Adult/Child Component

Helping parents support the intellectual growth of their children is one of the primary goals of Even Start. The emphasis on parenting skills is one of the features that distinguishes Even Start from other literacy programs.

The Dorchester County Even Start Program's original grant proposal contained six objectives related to parenting. Those objectives are as follow:

Objective 1. The number of literacy-related activities in the homes of project parents and children will increase through regular participation in the parent education activities.

Objective 2. The parenting skills of project parents will be developed or expanded through regular participation in planned parent education activities.

Objective 3. The comfort level of project parents toward the school will increase through regular volunteer activities at one or more project sites.

Objective 4. The relationship of project parents and children will improve through participation in planned

structured interaction activities.

Objective 5. Parents will demonstrate positive role models through regular participation in planned parent and child learning activities.

Objective 6. The positive interaction of parents and children will increase through attendance in the program.

A careful reading of these objectives indicates that each is not discrete; therefore, to discuss each one individually would involve needless repetition of data. The Adult/Child component will therefore be discussed as a whole with the overall objective being to increase or enhance parenting knowledge and skills through program participation.

Quantitative Data on Parenting:

The primary source of quantitative data for parenting skills comes from the Even Start National Evaluation Information System (NEIS), Parent -- Child Interactions and Parent as a Teacher instrument. Items for this instrument were drawn from four sources:

** Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME). The HOME inventory is used to measure the impact of parent training and education.

** High/Scope Home Environment Scale (H/SHES). The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation developed a highly structured parent interview to assess parenting and parent-child interaction for the National Home Start evaluation.

** Parent Interview for the National Longitudinal Study.

A self-report parent interview was used by the National Center for Educational Statistics in the National Longitudinal Study of Chapter I children to assess the home environment, educational experiences, and educational aspirations.

** Parent as a Teacher (PAAT). The Parent as a Teacher (PAAT) self-rating scale was developed to assess parents' attitudes toward their children and to determine feelings and values concerning children's behaviors.

The NEIS instrument consists of ten items drawn from the sources described. It was given to the Dorchester County Even Start Program participants and the local comparison group twice, at the beginning and end of the 1992-93 academic year. Pretest and posttest data will be compared to each other and to National Even Start data. Figure 1 describes the ten items and lists the response choices for each item or set of items.

Figure 1
NEIS Parent/Child Instrument Items

1 Household Tasks	Household tasks that child has helped with in the last month (5 items)	1 Never 2 Once or Twice 3 On a regular basis
2 Story Reading	Frequency of reading stories to child	1 Never 2 Less than once a week 3 Once a week 4 At least 3 times a week 5 Every day
3 Books in Home	Number of children's books in the home	1 None 2 1 or 2 books 3 3 to 9 books 4 10 or more books
4 Reading Material	Reading material found in the home (5 items- magazines, newspapers, TV guide, comic books, other)	0 No or blank 1 Yes
5 Play Things	Things children can play with found in the home (12 items)	0 No 1 Yes
6 Help Learn	Things parent has helped child learn during the past month	0 No, did not help 1 Yes, helped
7 Talk with Child	Things parent has talked with child about (6 items for all children, 2 additional items for school age children)	1 Never 2 Rarely, if ever 3 Once/twice a month 4 Once/twice a week 5 Daily
8 Success in school	How well parent thinks child will do in school	1 Very poorly 2 Poorly 3 About average 4 Well 5 Very well
9 Graduate High School	How likely parent thinks child will graduate from high school	1 Probably not 2 Not very likely 3 Somewhat likely 4 Very likely
10 Parent as a Teacher	Agreement with statements that reflect how children learn or the parent's role as a teacher (14 items)	1 Disagree strongly 2 Disagree somewhat 3 Agree somewhat 4 Agree strongly

The pretest was given to the Dorchester County Even Start participants and the local comparison group and mean scores were calculated for each of the ten items. When possible, average scores were calculated for each group of related items since scales based on several items are more reliable than single items. For example, the five items on reading material were each scored 0 for "no" or 1 for "yes" and averaged. The gain for each scale was calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest.

On all ten items, the Dorchester County Even Start Program's pretest mean scores were higher than those of the comparison group's pretest. This can be understood by the fact that many of the Even Start participants were returning to the program; thus, they had the advantage of the program in the preceding academic year. In all but two items the Dorchester pretest scores were higher than the National Even Start pretest mean scores. In nearly all cases the comparison group had the lowest pretest mean scores followed by the National Even Start data; the Dorchester program had the highest average scores.

Even though it had higher pretest scores, the Dorchester County Even Start program had larger gains than the other two groups. In nine of the ten items the Dorchester County program scored higher mean gains between pretest and posttest scores. The comparison group's pretest and posttest scores were not significantly different. This means that even though the Dorchester County program participants started with a higher

score because of earlier training, they continued to increase their scores at more than the average national gain.

For a better estimation of the true gain that may be attributed to the program, one must examine the difference between the comparison group's pretest scores and the Dorchester County Even Start's posttest scores. Since the profile of the comparison group is nearly identical to that of the program participants, one may assume that their pretest scores are a good estimation of where the average Dorchester County program participant begins. The program posttest scores illustrate the impact of the program. Data for these scores are displayed in Table 11.

TABLE 11

Comparison on Growth of Parenting Measures

Scale Items	Average Comparison Group Pretest	Average Dorchester Even Start Pretest	Average National Even Start Pretest	Average Dorchester Even Start Gain	Average National Even Start Gain	Average Comparison Group Pre- Test Even Start/Post- test Gain
1. Household Tasks	2.11	2.51	2.24	.23	.18	.63
2. Story Telling	2.85	3.95	3.43	.57	.27	1.67
3. Childrens' Books	3.20	3.81	3.38	.19	.22	.80
4. Reading Material	.32	.62	.49	.18	.05	.48
5. Play Things	.314	.58	.60	.25	.11	.51
6. Help Learn	.57	.88	.80	.11	.06	.42
7. Talk to Child	2.71	4.20	4.08	.32	.17	1.81
8. Success in School	3.85	4.04	4.19	.44	.10	.63
9. Graduate High School	3.40	3.80	3.74	.20	.05	.60
10. Parent as Teacher	3.20	3.21	3.34	.27	.05	.26

All gains were significant $p < .001$

Qualitative Information on Parenting:

A. Journal Entries

In addition to the Parent-Child Interview, additional data were collected to determine to what extent parents have developed or improved parenting skills. One method was through journal entries. The participants were presented with a problem related to parenting and were instructed to explain how they would address the problem in a journal entry. The same problem was posed in September, 1992 and again in May, 1993. This was part of on-going journal writing and the participants were not aware that this was to become part of an assessment of the program. The question posed to the adult participants was: "How would you handle your child (or children) if they cursed at the dinner table?" Complete journal entries for both September and May were available for 16 of the adult participants. A content analysis of the 32 journal entries was performed and the results are reported in Table 12.

Table 12
Parenting Journal Entries
Content Analysis

Parent Responses	Frequency of Responses	
	<u>September</u>	<u>May</u>
Tell child not to use the word	6	9
Send the child to his/her room	6	4
Put the child in a corner	2	0
"Beat his butt good"	4	0
Talk to the child	4	8
"Smack him in the mouth"	6	0
Ask where the child heard the word	3	4
Excuse the child from the table	2	6
Punish with "no treats"	0	4
Wash the child's mouth out with soap	1	0
Make child write, "I will not curse."	1	0
Have child define the curse word	0	1
Have the child write the curse word	0	1
Be shocked to hear such words	0	2
Realize the child may be testing me	0	1
Explain that cursing is wrong	0	9
Tell my child that he has upset me	0	2
Tell my child I still love him	0	2
Put child in the 10-minute chair	0	3
Tell my child cursing is bad manners	0	3
Remember never to hit my child	0	1
Ask him if he knows what the word means	0	2
Warn of punishment if it happens again	0	3
Realize that parents are models	0	1
Discuss self-respect	0	2
Responses to inflict physical harm	7	0
Total number of parental options	35	68
Average number of words written	31.5	79.31

As Table 12 indicates, parents were able to identify almost two times as many options to deal with the problem when they wrote the second journal entry. The length of the entries, more than double in length, suggests that the parents were giving more thought to the problem and they came up with almost twice the number of possible solutions to this parenting problem. The nature of their responses also differs from the first journal entry in September to the second entry in May. In May, the adults discussed issues important to parenting such as considering whether the child actually knows what the curse word is, or realizing that the child may be testing the parent's tolerance. The parents identified specific strategies such as a "time-out chair," using patience when talking to the child, and remembering after the problem is over to give the child a hug and tell him that he is still loved. Absent from the second journal entries were any references to inflicting physical harm to the child. While seven parents mentioned beating the child, slapping the child in the mouth, or washing the child's mouth out with soap in the September writing, no such mentions of physical punishment occurred in the May writing. Significantly, in May one parent mentioned that she must remember never to hit her child.

There are very clear and important differences between the two journal entries. Parents in the Dorchester County Even Start Program had lectures, programs, activities, and discussions related to parenting throughout the year. The differences in the

two journal entries are an indication that the Even Start Program was successful in meeting its objective of developing and expanding the parenting skills of the adult participants.

B. Parent Participation in the Child's School

A factor in effective parenting is participation in a variety of community and child-specific activities. Not all of the adults in Even Start have children in the local schools. However, for those parents who do have school-age children, it is important that they take an active part in their child's education by visiting the school and meeting with their child's teacher. It is also important that parents possess and use the knowledge and skills necessary for effective parenting. Through the Even Start program, parents are encouraged to become active in their children's schools and to develop and improve parenting skills. The Even Start parents of school-age children, approximately 30 parents, took part in over 600 meetings of activities during the program year. These included such activities as: special events at the child's school, school lecture programs, parent teacher conferences, and parenting seminars. A complete tally of these activities is found in Table 13.

Table 13

Participation in School-Related Activities by Parents

Activity	Number of Incidents
Parenting Programs	310
Parent/Teacher Conferences	105
Volunteering in the Child's School	92
Attending School Lecture Programs	31
Attending Special Events in Schools	30
Attending Chapter I Meetings	8
Going to Back-to-School Night	8
Attending PTA Meetings	7
Other Activities related to Child's School	11

The Adult/Child Component is the distinguishing feature of the Even Start Program. Though in some ways the most important component, it is the most difficult to objectively measure. This evaluation has examined empirical quantitative data, provided an analysis of a subjective writing assignment, and documented parents' participation in events and meetings related to their children. A series of videotapes, part of the Program's portfolio, show how parent-child interaction has developed and improved throughout the academic year. Though none of these are definitive in themselves, cumulatively they point to the same conclusion: the program is effective in enhancing parenting knowledge and skills.

C. Child Component

Objective 1. The development skills of the project children will increase through regular participation in the preschool activities and the parent and child activities.

To quantitatively evaluate this objective the Even Start children and those children of the comparison group families were given the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Revised Edition (PPVT-R) and Pre School Inventory (PSI) in September (pretest) and April (posttest). The PSI was selected as a measure of 3 to 5 year-old children's readiness for school. The instrument assesses a range of school readiness skills, for example, identifying shapes and colors and understanding numerical concepts. The PSI has been shown to be highly reliable and to correlate well with other measures of cognitive ability.

Interpretation of PSI data is done by looking at the difference between the pretest and posttest. The pretest raw score was subtracted from the posttest raw score to calculate the gain. The gain was divided by the number of months between the pretest and posttest resulting in the number of items gained per month.

The Even Start participants had a mean monthly increase of 1.31 items. Studies have shown that children can be expected to gain .42 items per month without a preschool experience. The average gain for all Even Start programs nationally is .92 items per month thus the Dorchester County program mean gain is well above the national average. The comparison group actually had an

average decrease of $-.24$ items per month. This may be seen as an indication of the severity of the problems facing children in this population in Dorchester County.

The PPVT-R measures receptive vocabulary and gives a quick estimate of verbal or literacy-related skills. A receptive or hearing vocabulary is important for early school success.

The same procedures were used on the PPVT-R data as were used on the PSI scores. An average monthly gain was calculated for each child. For the Even Start children the mean monthly gain was 2.5 standard score points. This is over twice the $.83$ standard score increase reported by Even Start programs nationally. Again, the comparison group actually experienced an average of a loss - 1.01 points per month. These findings are illustrated on Table 14.

Table 14

A Comparison of Mean Monthly Gains on the PSI and PPVT-R

<u>Program</u>	<u>Mean Monthly Increases</u>	
	<u>PSI</u>	<u>PPVT-R</u>
Dorchester Even Start	1.31	2.50
Even Start National Data	.92	.83
Comparison Group	$-.24$	-1.01

In conclusion, the data from the PSI and PPVT-R provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of the Even Start program in

its objective to increase the development skills of the children in the program. The increases in scores are significantly higher than those of children in Even Start Programs nationwide.

Objective 2. There will be increased self-concept as a result of working in the program.

It has not been possible to directly measure quantitative changes in the children's self-concept due to the absence of a valid instrument to measure self-concept in children of the 3 - 5 age group. There is anecdotal evidence from the comments of parents, teachers and professionals from other agencies to indicate that the program has had a positive impact on the participants' self-concept. The literature on self-concept shows a strong relationship between it and successful achievement of tasks. It seems reasonable to deduce that the success experienced by the children in the program, as indicated by the improvement of the PSI and PPVT-R scores, has lead to an increase in their self-concept.

EVALUATION QUESTION II

To what extent has the Even Start program provided support or influenced families in ways beyond the specific objectives?

Activity Records

The Even Start Home Visitors have broad responsibilities beyond those narrowly specified in the grant. During the academic year 1992-93 the Home Visitors recorded 642 telephone

calls directly related to client needs and/or concerns, such as: doctors' appointments, transportation, case collaboration, recruitment, school conferences, etc. In addition to the telephone calls, the Home Visitors made a total of 1533 home visits, an average of 192 per month. These visits were made in regard to a variety of activities such as: recruitment, parent/child activities, medical concerns, school concerns, screening appointments, transportation, etc. A breakdown of these data are illustrated in Tables 15 and 16.

TABLE 15
Type of Activity by Month (1992-1993)

Month	Telephone Calls	Home Visits
September	105	305
October	109	239
November	90	173
December	60	154
January	67	166
February	85	125
March	73	188
April	53	183
Totals	643	1533
Average per mo.	80.25	191.63

Table 16
Contacts with Collaborating Agencies by Month (1992-1993)

	<u>Social Services</u>	<u>Health Dept.</u>	<u>Doctors' Offices</u>	<u>DDU</u>	<u>Other*</u>	<u>Head Start</u>	<u>St.Clair School</u>	<u>Hill School</u>	<u>Maple School</u>	<u>Sandy Other Schools</u>
September	7	8	22	13	1	3	33	19	4	0
October	24	1	25	8	1	5	31	12	5	0
November	9	2	15	8	2	3	11	35	20	6
December	27	1	8	3	15	3	4	5	2	1
January	11	5	14	5	4	6	3	16	10	2
February	23	0	18	7	4	9	8	38	18	3
March	18	7	17	3	5	10	4	15	7	1
April	6	6	6	1	2	4	7	12	1	2
Totals	125	30	125	48	34	43	68	152	67	15
Average per Mo.	15.63	3.75	15.63	6	4.25	5.38	8.5	19	8.38	1.88

The activity records of the Home Visitors demonstrate extensive interaction between the Even Start program and the community. The program not only delivers needed services to its clients, but is also able to act as an advocate for its clients in helping them to access other needed services.

EVALUATION QUESTION III

To what degree has the Even Start program met its objectives as perceived by the participants?

In order to determine the perceptions of the adult participants regarding their experience in the Even Start Program through qualitative measures, structured interviews were conducted during the 1992-1993 academic year. These data provide insights into benefits gained by the participating families which most likely were not captured by the quantitative evaluation instruments.

Methodology

A random sample of six participants in the Even Start Program were interviewed. The sample included participants who have been in the program for one, two, or three years. The interviewer who was trained in ethnographic data collection became familiar with the participants through observing daily activities in the Even Start Program. Throughout the academic year the interviewer attended morning and afternoon sessions twice weekly. The participants came to know the interviewer as a

frequent visitor to the program and had regular conversations with her. Accordingly, the interviewer had established a positive rapport with the participants before the interviews began and maintained this relationship throughout the academic year.

A series of interviews using a structured interview questionnaire with opportunities for open-ended discussion was conducted and the responses were analyzed. The goal of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the Even Start Program as it is experienced and perceived by the participants. A primary purpose was to determine how the participants view the program and the changes, if any, which have occurred in themselves, their children, and their family life as they have progressed through Even Start.

Findings

Certain key issues emerged from these interviews, issues related to the Even Start program as well as to the personal experiences of the adults as learners and as parents. In general, these issues may be categorized according to: personal empowerment, confidence in parenting, valuing education and family, and sense of a future direction.

a.) Personal Empowerment

One key variable which was identified by most of the adults is the sense of personal empowerment. They noted that participation in Even Start has resulted in their going to visit their children's schools, talking with their children's teachers,

and in one case, even volunteering to help in the child's classroom. Parents now help their children with their homework. The parents see themselves as active members of their community. Unfortunately, although all of the parents expressed a sense of community activism, they consistently reported that the drug problem in the community was a deterrent to their complete involvement. In the 1992 national election, they all registered and voted. By the end of the academic year, all but one of the adults had passed the test and acquired a Maryland drivers' license. The participants in Even Start described these accomplishments with pride; in their perceptions, these are major successes.

The adults frequently mentioned that they had learned how to solve problems. One participant said that, in the past, when things got tough, she just went to bed and pulled the covers over her head. Now she knows that she is not the only person with problems and she knows how to get help for herself and her children. Asked, "What if anything has changed for you during this year?" responses included:

"Everything. I have confidence and I'm going to college in the fall."

"I have something to look forward to . . . I am doing something for myself and it makes me a lot more confident. The future seems really just to me and it seems good for my kids, too."

"I got my diploma and my drivers license. I really feel like nothing can stop me. I have never felt better in my life. I want to keep going, too. I have new goals now that I have gotten some of my original ones."

b.) Confidence in Parenting

The issue of **confidence in parenting** emerged as the adults discussed their attitudes toward working with their children. They were proud to have the knowledge and skills to help their children with their homework; as one mother said, "Before Even Start I didn't have the patience or the skills." The parents mentioned an improvement in their interactions with their children. For example, several mothers noted that while their evenings used to be spent watching TV, they now cook dinner as a family activity and then study together with their children. Parents whose children are not yet in school read to their children and play games; often these include the books and activities provided by Even Start. One parent described making a "healthy snack of celery and peanut butter" with her children and then doing their homework together. Most importantly, parents report that they now spend more time talking to their children and listening to them; they characterize themselves as better parents.

When asked about frustrating experiences in parenting, the adults offered the following:

"I told my twelve-year old daughter, 'This is the first time I've been the mother of a teen and this is the first time you've been a teen. Let's work together at this.'"

"Before coming to Even Start, I never listened. I just told the kids that I didn't want to hear anything. Now, I take the time to calm down and then I listen to them. Like, I might call the teacher to find out what really happened or I might call the kid that my child is having trouble with. . . I volunteer at my son's school and I think he feels better just

knowing that I am there. I think that it makes a difference."

"When my daughters fight with each other I put them in different rooms. Before coming to Even Start I would have just beat them. Now . . . I can make them do stuff that I want and I don't have to hit them."

c.) Values toward themselves, their children, and education

Another variable which emerged from the interviews was a change in values. Participants described a shift in values in two areas: their attitudes toward education and the priority they place on themselves and their children. For example, one mother said that when she realized that she needed to take control of her life, her children took priority. Another parent showed her child's report card and a story the child had written. She was truly proud of her child's educational accomplishment. Parents take pride in their children's education, for example one participant said, "I was so proud when my daughter made the honor roll. I felt so good. My other daughter was star of the week and that made me proud, too. I think they work hard because they see me work hard. They are more excited than me for me to get my G.E.D." Another participant seemed to sum up the attitudes of many of the adults when she said,

"To me, learning is important. If you can't learn, then you are a lost cause. That's why I am here. Even though my kids are young, I am teaching them that learning is the most important thing you can do. I try to set a good example. They love school. The difference between me and my mother is that my mother couldn't read or write. I can help my kids. My mother couldn't. She knew that school was important, too, and she really tried to help, but she just didn't know what to do. I know that I have to set an

example. It's hard to ask other people for help, but I knew that was what I had to do to come back. Now that I have my G.E.D. diploma I want to go to college. I might just get a job. Whatever I do though, I know that I am going to keep bettering myself."

d.) Sense of a future direction

The adults who have continued in the family literacy program for one or more years, also expressed a **sense of direction for the future**. Adults who are new to the program said that they could not see beyond Even Start. However, the long-term participants were able to state goals for themselves and their children. Most identified a home, a job, and independence from government aid as goals. They have realistic goals for careers as beauticians, elder care workers, and nurses. In some cases the participants realize the dire unemployment statistics in their town and they have made arrangements to relocate to another area upon leaving Even Start. One mother of three children wants to become active in politics in order to improve her community.

Importantly, all of the parents identified success in school for their children as an on-going goal. These parents want their children to have better lives than they have had. For example, a single mother of three children said,

"My children already have something better than I did. They have a parent who really cares. I care about their futures and this is something that my dad never did. . . my mom and dad didn't care about school. I care. I want my kids to have an education. I'll do anything to see that they stay in school."

Discussion

These outcomes of personal empowerment, confidence in

parenting, valuing education and family, and sense of a future direction are clear marks of success for the adults in the Even Start Program. They may not appear in the test data, but, nevertheless, are indicators of change. Specifically, they are indicators of change in personal/social development. Personal/social development goals are often neglected in academic programs. Instead, cognitive/academic goals are emphasized. Thus, change in personal or social development occurs, if at all, through the hidden curriculum. While family literacy programs cannot change society or the problems of society, life chances for the individual can be improved.

The curriculum in the Even Start program contains elements which may have effected the kinds of change which the adult participants reported. The curriculum addresses cognitive and academic goals in the three components of the program: adult education, early childhood education, and adult/child education. The adult education curriculum emphasizes basic education for improvement in reading, math, and language skills, the development of pre-employment and vocational skills, and education in parenting skills related to an understanding of child development. The goals of the early childhood curriculum include cognitively-oriented pre-school activities based on learning through play and exploration. The third component of the program, the parent/child curriculum, underscores skill practice in parenting and literacy skills.

It is significant that the Dorchester County Even Start

curriculum also does include personal/social development goals. Across the curriculum, the following goals are specifically stated: 1) The concept that parents are first and foremost educators of their children will be stressed; 2) An interdisciplinary approach will develop a supportive environment conducive to the improved literacy of parents and their children; 3) Parents will join their children for learning activities in an atmosphere where learning is fun; 4) Teachers will develop a supportive environment conducive to self-actualization and improved literacy for parents and their children; and 5) Liaison with community agencies will bring their resources to bear on problems faced by families.

Admittedly, achievement of cognitive/academic goals is easier to measure than achievement of personal/social development goals. Specific measures of outcomes in terms of attitudes, values, and personal beliefs are difficult to obtain. However, the responses to these interview questions suggest that, from the perspective of the adult participants, personal/social development changes are occurring.

Moreover, the respondents attributed the changes they experienced to Even Start. They credit their success to the non-traditional approaches offered by the program. Some of their comments included the following:

"This was very different from high school."

"There is more support here than I expected."

"It is more fun than I thought it would be"

"It's not just a GED."

"The parenting was a surprise."

"I like the way we talk while we learn and I like the group work; the discussion situations are the best."

When asked, "Can you give some advice to a mother who might be thinking about coming to Even Start?," the parents replied:

"I'd just say come. You will be surprised how good it is. I was. I didn't even know how much I needed the program until I started coming. Just come and you'll see too. It will really give you something to be proud of. It will also give your kids something too. You have to let your kids see that you are working hard or else their lives aren't going to be any different from yours. I want more for my kids."

I have told people about the program but you can't make anybody that doesn't want to come. If they have goals and they are ready to make a change, then please come, but if you don't have goals don't come because you will just take the place from someone who does have goals and is trying. It doesn't make sense to make people come. They will just ruin it for everybody. The funny thing is that the people who think that they don't need it are the people who do. That's the way that I was. I guess I would say, come before it is too late for your kids, but make it happen inside yourself."

"Stick to it. I have been in it for four years and I know that it is taking a long time, but it is worth it. It's a lot of work, but if you stick to it, you won't be sorry. I have seen people who have made it. They really care about you here. It's like a family for you and your kids. If somebody sees it, and they don't like it then they must not want it. Sometimes, though, people say that they don't want something but they really do. This one friend of mine said that she didn't need it and then one night she felt like she was going to kill her child so I called our Teacher and told her what was happening and she came over and helped my friend. Now, my friend is in the program and I think things are a lot better for her. Even though she thought she didn't want to be here she really needed it. I have asked a lot of people to come as a matter of fact."

"It's really a great learning experience. Not just for the mother, but for the kids too. Just try."

I bet if you come, you will really like it. I have brought people to the program. I always tell them they should take advantage of it. It's great. I did. Now, I have my diploma. If it hadn't been for Even Start, I would still be stuck at home, watching the stories--soaps. That doesn't do anything for you. Even Start really helped me and it can help you too."

"If you want it - because if you don't want it no one can make you do it - then I would say just try it. I would tell her that it might seem really scary, especially if you haven't been in school for a long time, but you get to work at your own pace. I have a friend who wants to come, but she says that she can't come back because she is as dumb as a door knob. I just tell her, everybody has questions. No one knows everything about everything. You'll see, everyone here is really nice. Just come for one day and you will see. Even if it takes you years to get your G.E.D. that's OK. Just as long as you try. You can also work on whatever stuff you want and you don't have to worry about anybody laughing at you. Everybody just works and it is really comfortable here."

"I would recommend the program to anybody. They will work with to you to get your G.E.D. and there is child care, so there really isn't any excuse. I see so many girls out there just sitting around I would tell them just give it a chance. You get stuff for your kids, like trips and books and you can get an education, too. Believe me, I know what it feels like at first because when I first came - God! - I would just sit in class and think why I am I here? But now, I have really changed. The time in class seems to go really quick. The people at the program are really great. It feels like a family here. It's not just the classroom; it's being with other people."

Conclusion

The participants in the Even Start Program have said throughout the 1992-93 academic year that they have changed in a positive way and that Even Start has helped them to change. The statements made in these interviews strongly suggest that the adults believe that they have experienced changes in their sense of personal empowerment, confidence in parenting, valuing of

education and family, and sense of future direction.

These adult participants have expressed a high level of self-esteem regarding their involvement in the Dorchester County Even Start program. They express confidence in themselves as a result of their successful participation. They report that they feel better about their parenting skills and their abilities to help their children in school. They consistently express a value for education and for the promise of a better future for their children. Repeatedly, throughout the year, the adults have attributed the changes in their lives to Even Start. With Even Start behind them, they indicate specific, realistic goals for the future. Indeed, of the total of seventy-nine adults who have participated in Even Start since its beginning, 29% have left the program to go on to employment and 33% have moved on to additional training, including attending the Community College.

Clearly, the participants in the Dorchester County Even Start program have expressed a strong belief that because of this program they are able to provide a positive influence on their children, to offer positive role models, and to see themselves as partners in their children's education.

EVALUATION QUESTION IV

How is the Dorchester County Even Start program viewed by the human service and educational community personnel?

During April and May of 1993 a survey was completed of 19 educational, health and human services agencies in Dorchester

County. Every major agency or program that works with the Even Start population was included: the Department of Social Services, the Health Department, the Family Service Center, Project Independence, the County Library, the County Multi-Purpose Center, and the County Mental Health Clinic, and several educational programs. The results of the survey were extremely positive.

On a four-point scale of satisfaction 100% of the respondents reported that they were "Very Satisfied" with the program. In assessing the contribution of the program to the community, 95% identified the Even Start program as providing an "Essential Service to the Community;" 5% said the program was "Useful but not Essential."

These assessments are based on direct knowledge since 71% of the agencies reported daily or weekly contact with the program; 23% more reported monthly contact. The nature of the contact appears to be extensive as 72% of the respondents reported that the contact was "Program Collaboration," while 35% "Refer Clients to Even Start" and 47% "Receive Client Referrals from Even Start." These data demonstrate a high degree of cooperation and collaboration in the utilization of community resources.

These data are illustrated in Tables 17 and 18.

Table 17
Frequency of Contact

	Percentage
Daily	18
Weekly	53
Monthly	23
Occasionally (3-4 times year)	6
(N = 19)	100

Table 18
Nature of Contact

	Percentage *
Program Collaboration	72
Refer Clients to Even Start	35
Receive Referrals from Even Start	47
Informational	47
Other	35

*Reflects multiple counts since agencies could record more than one type of contact.

In addition to these data seven of the respondents added optional comments. They reflect the same positive response to the program. Edited for brevity and confidentiality they are:

** The Even Start Program in Dorchester County is exceptional. It is staffed by highly qualified professional and paraprofessionals who are dedicated,

caring individuals. This program is making a difference for those families who have needed the service which are being provided. It is the best program of its kind in which I have had the privilege of being involved.

** . . . The clients want to be there. The teacher/staff-student rapport in the program is excellent. The student/clients self-esteem has greatly increased since they began. The continued funding for Even Start would continue to benefit participants in Dorchester County

. . .

** Because of Even Start's design, the program is able to work with families in an integrated way . . . I wish all programs collaborated as well as Even Start does.

** This is a wonderful program. The staff is always so helpful and caring . . . I wish I had a program like this to work with in all the counties (Worcester, Somerset, Wicomico and Dorchester) which I work in. If we had more programs like this we could break the chains of poverty and illiteracy.

** I have observed a significant change in the attitude of parents who have attended the Even Start Program. . . . I have noticed tremendous gain in the achievement of the students.

** Our students whose parents participate in the program feel a great sense of pride that their parents are actively involved in our school activities . . . I wish more parents could be involved.

** . . . We at _____ believe that this program is an essential resource to the community and we will work cooperatively with them to further the program.

The survey documents the extensive interaction between the Even Start Program and the community. These data indicate that the Even Start Program has been successful in its goal to integrate its services with those of the other service providers in the county.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation has taken an extensive look at the Dorchester County Even Start Program utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study assessed the impact of the Program on its participants and the community. The structure of the report focused on four issues or questions:

- I. To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start program met its objectives as specified in the grant?
- II. To what extent has the Even Start program provided support or influenced families in ways beyond the specific objectives?

III. To what degree has the Even Start program met its objectives as perceived by the participants?

IV. How is the Even Start program viewed by the human service and educational community?

From the demographic comparison it is clear that the participants in the Dorchester County Even Start Program are more disadvantaged than participants nationwide. For many reasons, such as poverty and lack of education, this is a very difficult client population to work with; however, two overall impressions are clear. First, program participants, adults and children, are improving in every measurable category at a rate greater than the national average. Second, the success rate is attributable to the dedicated hard-working staff. The dedication and hard work of the Dorchester County Even Start staff has been referred to by the participants and the representatives of the other county agencies. The Community Survey was overwhelming in its praise. Even Start is a people-to-people program; technology is very limited in its application to program such as Even Start. There are no effective tricks or gimmicks in working with people who have experienced little or no success in their lives, who suffer from extremely low self-esteem, and have little functional education. To be successful, such a program needs a creative, enthusiastic, dedicated staff. The Even Start Program is meeting its objectives and much of the credit is due to its staff.

EVALUATION 1993-1994
DORCHESTER COUNTY EVEN START PROGRAM

Prepared for:
Dorchester County Board of Education
Cambridge, Maryland

Prepared by
Marvin G. Tossey, Ph.D.
and
Ellen V. Whitford, Ed.D.

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DORCHESTER COUNTY EVEN START PROGRAM EVALUATION

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND OVERVIEW

The National Even Start Program

Even Start is a national program authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as amended by the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988, Part B of Chapter 1 of Title I (P.L. 100-297).

According to the law, the Even Start program is intended to:

"...improve the educational opportunities of the Nation's children and adults by integrating early childhood education and adult education for parents into a unified program.... The program shall be implemented through cooperative projects that build on existing community resources to create a new range of services." (P.L. 100-297, Sec. 1051).

The Even Start program represents a combination of programs for adult basic education, parent education, and early childhood education. This federal initiative is planned to address the literacy crisis in the nation through an integrative approach to adult and early childhood education. Focusing on parents and children as a family unit, Even Start has three integrated goals:

- * to help parents become full partners in the education of their children;

- * to assist children in reaching their full potential as learners; and
- * to provide literacy training for their parents.

The Dorchester County Even Start Program

The Even Start Program in Dorchester County follows the program model of the National Even Start Program and has served the local community since the 1989-1990 academic year. It provides an interdisciplinary approach planned to develop a supportive environment conducive to the improved literacy of parents and their children.

The Dorchester County Even Start Project Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of Dorchester County Even Start is to break the cycle of illiteracy by providing a family-centered education which involves parents and children in a cooperative effort to improve their literacy skills. The program has three major components each of which has a major focus:

Adult Component -- To provide an instructional program that supports adult literacy.

Adult/Child Component -- To train parents to support the educational growth of their children.

Child Component -- To prepare children for success in the regular school program.

Population

To be eligible to participate in the Even Start Program, families must consist of at least one adult parent who is 16 years of age or older, has not completed high school, and

has a child (or children) between the ages of birth and seven years.

There are three groups of families discussed in this evaluation: participants in the Dorchester County Even Start Program, aggregated data on all the families participating in the Even Start Program nationwide, and a comparison group which was made up of Dorchester County residents who were eligible for the program but who did not participate. Tables 1 through 8 present a comparison of some general demographic characteristics of these three groups. Table 1 presents data on the number of adults in each family; Table 2 identifies the number of children in family; Table 3 shows family structure; Table 4 illustrates the primary source of financial support for each family; Table 5 presents family incomes; Table 6 identifies the adult participants by gender; Table 7 identifies the adult participants by race; and Table 8 identifies educational experience in terms of the highest grade completed.

The comparison group of twenty families was formed in the fall of 1993 to serve as a control group for this evaluation. The comparison group families were selected from families identified for Even Start, who would qualify for the program, but who are not participating. As a comparison of data in the tables shows, the population of the Dorchester County Even Start program more closely approximates that of the local comparison group used in this evaluation than the National Even Start population. The two Dorchester County groups are similar in family structure, income level, source of income, as well as race, gender, and education.

As these tables illustrate, participants in the Dorchester County Even Start Program differ from the National Even Start population in the areas of family composition, income,

and race. The Dorchester County Even Start participants are primarily single parent families (71.4%) who rely predominately (85.7%) on Government Assistance as the primary source of financial support. Of these families, 76.2% have a yearly income of less than \$5,000. The composition of the group is 100% Black and 100% female; 71.4% of the adults are the only adult in the family, and 85.7% did not graduate from high school. Based upon a comparison of these characteristics as illustrated in Tables 1 through 8, it is reasonable to conclude that the families who participate in the Dorchester County Even Start Program are at a greater disadvantage than the National Even Start population. These economically disadvantaged, single-parent families face significant obstacles which may limit the degree to which they may achieve success in the Even Start Program.

Table 1
Characteristics of Even Start Families
Number of Adults 18 and Over in the Family

Adults	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
One	34.9%	76.1%	70.0%
Two	52.3%	14.1%	25.0%
Three	7.2%	4.9%	5.0%
Four	3.1%	4.9%	0.0%
Five	.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Six+	.5%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 2

**Characteristics of Even Start Families
Number of Children in Family**

# Children	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
One	20.8%	23.8%	35.0%
Two	34.5%	42.8%	25.0%
Three	25.2%	23.8%	15.0%
Four	11.9%	0.0%	20.0%
Five	4.6%	4.8%	0.0%
Six+	3.0%	4.8%	5.0%

Table 3

**Characteristics of Even Start Families
Family Structure**

Structure	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Single Parent	38.2%	71.4%	65.0%
Couple	49.2%	9.5%	5.0%
Extended Family	11.3%	19.1%	30.0%
Other	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 4

Characteristics of Even Start Families
Primary Source of Financial Support

Source	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Job Wages	48.1%	14.3%	30.0%
Gov't. Asst.	50.7%	85.7%	70.0%
Alimony	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	4.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 5

Characteristics of Even Start Families
Range of Family Income

Range	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Under \$5,000	39.2%	76.2%	60.0%
\$5,000-10,000	29.2%	19.0%	25.0%
\$10,000-15,000	16.6%	0.0%	10.0%
\$15,000-20,000	7.7%	4.8%	0.0%
\$20,000+	7.5%	0.0%	5.0%

Table 6

Characteristics of Even Start Families
by Gender of Adult Participant

Gender	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Female	80.3%	100.0%	95.0%
Male	19.7%	0.0%	5.0%

Table 7
Characteristics of Even Start Families
by Race

Race	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Black	26.5%	100.0%	95.0%
White	46.2%	0.0%	5.0%
Hispanic	18.5%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 8
Characteristics of Even Start Families
by Education

Highest Grade Completed	National Even Start	Dorchester Even Start	Comparison Group
Less than 8	18.6%	9.5%	5.0%
8 -- 12	60.9%	76.2%	50.0%
H.S. Diploma	13.3%	14.3%	40.0%
GED	3.6%	0.0%	5.0%
Other	3.6%	0.0%	0.0%

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

Need for a Local Evaluation

In Section 1058(c) of the Even Start legislation, Congress stipulated that Even Start projects should submit evidence of their effectiveness for approval by the Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel (PEP). Approval by PEP results in entry to the National Diffusion Network (NDN). The number of Even Start projects that are approved by the PEP is an outcome measure of the effectiveness of the entire program. Compliance

with this section of the legislation is primarily the responsibility of individual Even Start grantees through local evaluation.

In addition, local evaluation may provide additional information desired by local administrators. Specifically, local evaluation may address the basic research question: How does the project meet specified local needs?

Plan of the Evaluation

This evaluation will demonstrate the impact of the Even Start program on its participants and the community in ways that are identifiable both quantitatively and qualitatively. In general, the evaluation will examine how well the Even Start program has met its stated objectives as well as how well the Even Start program has provided additional support for families and the community. The evaluation report will provide answers to the following four questions:

1. To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program met its objectives as stated in the grant proposal?
2. To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program provided additional support services or influenced families in ways which are not specifically identified as objectives of the grant?
3. To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program met its stated objectives as perceived by the participants?
4. How is the Even Start Program viewed by the Community, specifically by other community agencies and school personnel?

EVALUATION QUESTION ONE

To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program met its objectives as stated in the 1993 grant proposal?

A. Adult Component

Through regular participation in Adult Basic Education classes from October to May with a 75% attendance rate, the following will occur:

Objective 1: The literacy level of the parents will increase by 3.5 scale points as measured by the CASAS.

Objective 2: Parents who have attained the GED preparation level will increase their educational level as measured by individual achievement on the GED practice tests.

Objective 3: Parents will increase their employability knowledge and skills as measured by pretest/posttest scores on the Employability Orientation/Skills Inventory.

Objective 4: Parents will improve their self-esteem as indicated by qualitative measures, including interviews and journal entries.

It must be noted that for the purposes of grant renewal the program period evaluated was eight weeks shorter than anticipated when the objectives were written; therefore, the program goals must be adjusted to 70% of the original to accommodate the reduced program year.

Objective One: The literacy level of the parents will increase by 3.5 scale points as measured by the CASAS.

To assess the effectiveness of the adult education and child school readiness components of the program, the same quasi-experimental design implemented during the 1992 - 1993 program year was continued. Data were collected at the beginning and the end of the year from the Even Start family participants as well as the comparison group.

The adults were given the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) to measure the educational level of the parents. The children were given the Pre School Inventory (PSI) and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R).

Both the comparison group and the adult Even Start participants were given the CASAS in October (pretest) and in March (posttest). The pretest scale score average for the Even Start participants was 232.2, and for the comparison group was 230.31. The slight difference can be explained by the fact that some of the Even Start participants were returning students and had previous Adult Basic Education in the program. The comparison group scores closely reflect the profile of the national pretest scale scores. This comparison is illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9
Distribution of CASAS Pretest Scale Scores
of Comparison Group and National Even Start Norms

<u>Functional Level</u>	<u>Percent at Pretest</u>	
	<u>National Norm</u>	<u>Comparison Group (N = 16)</u>
under 200	4	0.0
200-214	8	6.2
215-225	17	25.0
225 or above	71	68.8
	100	100

The posttest scores were 234.90 for the Even Start participants and 228.44 for the comparison group. This represents a gain of 2.70 points for the program participants and an actual reduction of -1.87 points for the comparison group. These data are illustrated on Table 10. The 2.70 point gain for the program group is slightly better than the adjusted program objective 2.50 points and is average for expected gain that can be anticipated for the number of hours of instruction provided.

Table 10
Comparison of CASAS Pretest and Posttest Scores
for Dorchester County Even Start and Local Comparison Group

Test	Mean Scores (Standard Deviation)	
	Dorchester Even Start (N=20)	Comparison Group (N=16)
Pretest	232.20 (10.94)	230.31 (9.99)
Posttest	234.90 (8.59)	228.44 (8.95)
Differences	+2.70	-1.87

Of greater importance than one year gains are the gains experienced by the Dorchester program participants over a two year period. Of the eleven participants who have two years of participation, there has been a 6.23 point increase (pretest average 228.50, posttest 234.73). This is a significantly higher increase than could be expected given pretest scores and the number of hours of instruction.

Objective Two: Parents who have attained the GED preparation level will increase their educational level as measured by individual achievement on the GED practice tests.

Of ten program participants who were involved in GED preparation, all showed improvement in all five subject areas between the pretests and posttests. Five participants passed one or more subject areas during the year and one completed the program and received her GED diploma.

Objective Three: Parents will increase their employability knowledge and skills as measured by pretest/posttest scores on the Employability Orientation/Skills Inventory.

A major objective of the adult component of the Even Start Program is to increase the parents' employability by not only increasing their academic knowledge and skills, but also by changing their attitude, motivation, and behavior related to employment. Such personal qualities as desire to work, punctuality, pride in performance, and ability to follow instructions are essential when considering employability.

The Employability Orientation/Skills Inventory developed in 1993 to measure this variable was employed again this program year in the form of a pretest and posttest for program participants. The 19-item scale has a maximum score of 57. The mean pretest score was 26.5 with a 44.75 for the posttest. This is similar to the 1992-1993 mean scores of 26.33 and 41.89. This year's increase reflects nearly a 70% improvement between the pretest and posttest.

Significant gains were made for both participants who attended regularly and those

who had less regular attendance. The mean scores for those with greater than 75% attendance were 31.27 and 51.36 while those with less than a 75% attendance rate had scores of 20.67 and 36.67. This finding confirms that attendance is related to motivation which is reflected in the lower pretest score. The lower participation group did demonstrate a 77% improvement even with irregular attendance. This demonstrates that the program is successful in reaching clients with the poorest attitudes add lowest motivation. These data are illustrated in Table 11.

Table 11
**Comparison of Pre and Post Mean Employability Orientation/
Skills Serves by Program Participation**

Test	Participation Level	
	High	Irregular
Pre	31.27	20.67
Post	51.36	36.67

An indicator that these changes are maintained can be observed when one compares the scores of the 1992-1993 high participation group to the 1993-1994 high participants. The 1993-1994 pretest was 3.41 higher than the 1992-1993 pretest while the posttest is 5.8 points higher. Since many members of the 1993-1994 high participation group are in their second year, it demonstrates that many of the gains made last year were maintained during the summer break and were built upon during this program year.

Objective Four: Parents will improve their self-esteem as indicated by qualitative measures, including interviews and journal entries.

Self-esteem is an abstract concept that is difficult to measure; however, it is important for one to be an effective parent and/or employee. Rather than depend on one measure of the concept, this evaluation has used both a quantitative self-esteem scale and qualitative measures from journal entries and interviews.

The Index of Self-Esteem, or ISE, was developed as part of the Clinical Measurement Package, or the CMP Scales, by Hudson in 1982 for use by practitioners and researchers. The instrument is widely used in social and behavioral research. It was selected for the evaluation because of its demonstrated validity and the relatively brief length (25 items).

Program participants scored 28.65 scale points in the pretest and 23.71 in the posttest for an improvement of 4.9 points (lower scores indicate higher self-esteem). This statistically significant improvement ($p < .05$) was accomplished within the shortened evaluation period. Additional evidence of the program's effectiveness in this area is to be found in the qualitative analysis.

B. Adult/Child Component

Through regular participation in planned parent/child activities from October to May with a 75% attendance rate, the following will occur:

Objective 1: Parenting knowledge and skills will be improved as indicated by gains on the NEIS, Part B instrument that are equal to or greater than the Even Start national average.

Objective 2: The parenting skills of project parents will be developed or increased as measured by pre-post problem-solving journal entries written by parents.

Objective 3: Parents with children in school will increase their participation in their child's education through volunteer activities or visits to their child's school as indicated by a project log.

Objective One: Parenting knowledge and skills will be improved as indicated by gains on the NEIS, Part B instrument that are equal to or greater than the Even Start national average.

The primary source of quantitative data for parenting skills comes from the Even Start National Evaluation Information System (NEIS), Parent -- Child Interactions and Parent as a Teacher instrument. Items for this instrument were drawn from four sources:

** Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME). The HOME inventory is used to measure the impact of parent training and education.

** High/Scope Home Environment Scale (H/SHES). The High/ Scope Educational Research Foundation developed a highly structured parent interview to assess parenting and parent-child interaction for the National Home Start evaluation.

** Parent Interview for the National Longitudinal Study. A self-report parent interview was used by the National Center for Educational Statistics in the National Longitudinal Study of Chapter I children to assess the home environment, educational experiences, and educational aspirations.

** Parent as a Teacher (PAAT). The Parent as a Teacher (PAAT) self-rating scale was developed to assess parents' attitudes toward their children and to determine feelings and values concerning children's behaviors.

The NEIS instrument consists of ten items drawn from the sources described. It was given to the Dorchester County Even Start Program participants and the local comparison group twice, at the beginning and end of the 1993-94 academic year. Pretest and posttest data will be compared to each other and to National Even Start data. Figure 1 describes the ten items and lists the response choices for each item or set of items.

Figure 1
NEIS Parent/Child Instrument Items

1 Household Tasks	Household tasks that child has helped with in the last month (5 items)	1 Never 2 Once or Twice 3 On a regular basis
2 Story Reading	Frequency of reading stories to child	1 Never 2 Less than once a week 3 Once a week 4 At least 3 times a week 5 Every day
3 Books in Home	Number of children's books in the home	1 None 2 1 or 2 books 3 3 to 9 books 4 10 or more books
4 Reading Material	Reading material found in the home (5 items- magazines, newspapers, TV guide, comic books, other)	0 No or blank 1 Yes
5 Play Things	Things children can play with found in the home (12 items)	0 No 1 Yes
6 Help Learn	Things parent has helped child learn during the past month	0 No, did not help 1 Yes, helped
7 Talk with Child	Things parent has talked with child about (6 items for all children, 2 additional items for school age children)	1 Never 2 Rarely, if ever 3 Once/twice a month 4 Once/twice a week 5 Daily
8 Success in School	How well parent thinks child will do in school	1 Very poorly 2 Poorly 3 About average 4 Well 5 Very well
9 Graduate High School	How likely parent thinks child will graduate from high school	1 Probably not 2 Not very likely 3 Somewhat likely 4 Very likely
10 Parent as a Teacher	Agreement with statements that reflect how children learn or the parent's role as a teacher (14 items)	1 Disagree strongly 2 Disagree somewhat 3 Agree somewhat 4 Agree strongly

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The pretest was given to the Dorchester County Even Start participants and the local comparison group and mean scores were calculated for each of the ten items. When possible, average scores were calculated for each group of related items since scales based on several items are more reliable than single items. For example, the five items on reading material were each scored 0 for "no" or 1 for "yes" and averaged. The gain for each scale was calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest.

On all ten items, the Dorchester County Even Start Program's pretest mean scores were higher than those of the comparison group's pretest. This can be understood by the fact that many of the Even Start participants were returning to the program; thus, they had the advantage of the program in the preceding academic year. In all but three items the Dorchester pretest scores were higher than the National Even Start pretest mean scores. In nearly all cases the comparison group had the lowest pretest mean scores followed by the National Even Start data; the Dorchester program had the highest average scores.

Even though it had higher pretest scores, the Dorchester County Even Start program had larger gains than the other two groups. In all ten items the Dorchester County program scored higher mean gains between pretest and posttest scores. The comparison group's pretest and posttest scores were not significantly different. This means that even though the Dorchester County program participants started with a higher score because of earlier training, they continued to increase their scores at more than the average national gain. The program posttest scores illustrate the impact of the program. Data for these scores are displayed in Table 12.

TABLE 12

Comparison of Growth of Parenting Measures

Scale Items	Average Comparison Group Pretest	Average Dorchester Even Start Pretest	Average National Even Start Pretest	Average Dorchester Even Start Gain	Average National Even Start Gain
1. Household Tasks	1.87	2.57	2.24	.21	.18
2. Story Telling	2.30	3.74	3.43	.36	.27
3. Children's Books	3.00	3.50	3.38	.25	.22
4. Reading Material	.40	.68	.49	.12	.05
5. Play Things	.39	.49	.60	.26	.11
6. Help Learn	.45	.84	.80	.11	.06
7. Talk to Child	3.35	4.30	4.08	.29	.17
8. Success in School	3.78	3.96	4.19	.34	.10
9. Graduate High School	3.55	3.85	3.74	.10	.05
10. Parent as Teacher	2.94	3.15	3.34	.36	.05

All gains were significant $p < .001$

Objective Two: The parenting skills of project parents will be developed or increased as measured by pre-post problem-solving journal entries written by parents.

In addition to the Parent-Child Interview, additional data were collected to determine to what extent parents have developed or improved parenting skills through analysis of journal entries. The participants were presented with problems related to parenting and were instructed to explain how they would address the problem in a journal entry. The same problem was posed in October 1993 and again in March 1994. This was part of on-going journal writing and the participants were not aware that this was to become part of an assessment of the program. The question posed to the adult participants was: "Your child has been sexually abused by a close relative. Explain how you would handle it." Complete journal entries for both October and March are available for 17 of the adult participants. A content analysis of the 34 journal entries was performed and the results are reported in Table 13.

Table 13
Parenting Journal Entries
Content Analysis

Parent Responses	Frequency of Responses	
	<u>October</u>	<u>March</u>
Confront the person to discuss what happened	2	5
Confront the person to fight/argue	3	0
Physically harm or kill the person	13	2
Be shocked, angry, or very upset	2	4
Call the police	5	12
Ask the police what to do	1	1
Have the person arrested/jailed	4	13
Take the person to court	2	6
Keep the person away from my child	3	3
Be angry and then calm down	1	1
Get information; find out the basic facts	2	3
Talk to my child	2	4
Comfort my child	2	0
Call 911	2	0
Tell the child to tell me if it happens again	1	0
Get the child to open his feelings	1	0
Take the child to the doctor	0	11
Tell the person's girlfriend/wife what he did	0	0
Be concerned about my child's well-being	0	1
Get professional help for my child	1	2
Get professional help for myself	0	2
Try to remain calm and rational	0	5
Be sure the person is under close supervision	0	1
Tell the child that I love him	0	2
Tell the child it was not his fault	0	3
Tell the child the person who did this was sick	0	1
Talk to an abuse worker	0	1
Take the doctor's results to the police	0	2
Tell my child I'll always be there for him	0	2
Listen to the child before I do anything	0	1
Ask the doctor how to work with my child	0	1
Total number of parental options	47	89
Average number of words written	57	82

As Table 13 indicates, parents were able to identify almost two times as many options to deal with the problem when they wrote the second journal entry. The length of the entries

suggests that the parents were giving more thought to the problem and they came up with almost twice the number of possible solutions to this parenting problem. The nature of their responses also differs from the first journal entry in October to the second entry in March. In March, the adults discussed issues important to handling this type of problem. They recognized that there are resources which they may use rather than "taking the matter into my own hands." The March journal entries mentioned contacts with agencies which collaborate with Even Start. While no parent mentioned contacting a doctor in October, eleven of the seventeen parents said they would take their child to a doctor in March. Similarly, in March the parents mentioned having counseling services for themselves and their child to help them get through the ordeal. The police and court system were also mentioned more than twice as frequently in March. Additionally, the parents wrote more items related to talking with their and providing love and support for the child. The March journals reflect a greater sense of empowerment on the part of the parents and a greater awareness of how to solve the problem identified.

There are very clear and important differences between the two journal entries. Parents in the Dorchester County Even Start Program had lectures, programs, activities, and discussions related to parenting, health, and mental health throughout the year. The differences in the two journal entries are an indication that the Even Start Program was successful in meeting its objective of developing and expanding the parenting skills of the adult participants.

Objective Three: Parents with children in school will increase their participation in their child's education through volunteer activities or visits to their child's school as indicated by a project log.

A factor in effective parenting is participation in a variety of community and child-specific activities. Not all of the adults in Even Start have children in the local schools. However, for those parents who do have school-age children, it is important that they take an active part in their child's education by visiting the school and meeting with their child's teacher. It is also important that parents possess and use the knowledge and skills necessary for effective parenting. Through the Even Start program, parents are encouraged to become active in their children's schools and to develop and improve parenting skills. The Even Start parents of school-age children participated on approximately 500 occasions in meetings or activities during the program year. These included such activities as: special events at the child's school, school lecture programs, parent teacher conferences, and parenting seminars. Data on all parent volunteer activities or visits to schools is collected and maintained by the Even Start staff. A complete tally of these activities is found in Table 14.

Table 14

Participation in School-Related Activities by Parents

Activity	Number of Incidents
Parenting Programs	362
Parent/Teacher Conferences	57
Parent/Administrator Conferences	6
Volunteering in the Child's School	34
Special Lunch with Child	9
Attending Special Events in Schools	30
Attending Chapter I Meetings	3
Special Services/ARD Meetings	5
Parent/Counselor	7
Other Activities related to Child's School	21

C. Child Component

Through regular participation in planned early childhood activities from October to May with a 75% attendance rate, the following will occur:

Objective 1: Children will increase their school readiness skills as measured by the Pre-School Inventory (PSI) by an average of at least .75 items per month.

Objective 2: Children will increase their receptive vocabulary as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) by an average of at least one standard score point per month.

It must be noted that for the purposes of grant renewal the program period evaluated was eight weeks shorter than anticipated when the objectives were written; therefore, the program goals must be adjusted to 70% of the original to accommodate the reduced program year.

Objective One: Children will increase their school readiness skills as measured by the Pre-School Inventory (PSI) by an average of at least .75 items per month.

To quantitatively evaluate this objective the Even Start children and those children of the comparison group families were given the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, Revised Edition (PPVT-R) and Pre School Inventory (PSI) in October (pretest) and March (posttest). The PSI was selected as a measure of 3 to 5 year-old children's readiness for school. The instrument assesses a range of school readiness skills, for example, identifying shapes and colors and understanding numerical concepts. The PSI has been shown to be highly reliable and to correlate well with other measures of cognitive ability.

Further, interpretation of PSI data is done by looking at the difference between the pretest and posttest. The pretest raw score is subtracted from the posttest raw score to calculate the gain. To obtain an average monthly gain, the gain is divided by the number of months between the pretest and posttest resulting in the number of items gained per month.

The Even Start participants had a mean monthly increase of 2.18 items. Studies have shown that children can be expected to gain .42 items per month without a preschool experience. The average gain for all Even Start programs nationally is .92 items per month thus the Dorchester County program mean gain is well above the national average. The comparison group actually had an average decrease of -.54 items per month. This may be seen as an indication of the severity of the problems facing children in this population in Dorchester County.

Objective Two: Children will increase their receptive vocabulary as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) by an average of at least one standard score point per month.

The PPVT-R measures receptive vocabulary and gives a quick estimate of verbal or

literacy-related skills. A receptive or hearing vocabulary is important for early school success.

The same procedures are used on the PPVT-R data as were used on the PSI scores. An average monthly gain was calculated for each child. For the Even Start children the mean monthly gain was 5.4 standard score points. This is over five times the .83 standard score increase reported by Even Start programs nationally. Again, the comparison group actually experienced an average of a loss - 2.70 points per month. These findings are illustrated on Table 15.

Table 15

A Comparison of Mean Monthly Gains on the PSI and PPVT-R

<u>Program</u>	<u>Mean Monthly Increases</u>	
	<u>PSI</u>	<u>PPVT-R</u>
Dorchester Even Start	2.18	5.40
Even Start National Data	.92	.83
Comparison Group	-.54	-2.70

In conclusion, the data from the PSI and PPVT-R provide strong evidence of the effectiveness of the Even Start program in its objective to increase the development skills of the children in the program. The increases in scores are significantly higher than those of children in Even Start Programs nationwide.

A comparison of the PSI and PPVT-R scores of the Dorchester County Even Start

Program and a national sample of Even Start Programs demonstrates the significant achievement of the Dorchester program. Table 16 illustrates that the Dorchester youth had over twice the gain in PSI scores and over eight times the gain in PPVT scores. Part of the explanation for the size of the gain is the fact that the Dorchester children start with such a relatively low score indicating severe deprivation. The PPVT standard score has a mean of 100 with a standard deviation of 15. This means that the average Dorchester program child's pretest score is over two standard deviations below the mean; however, posttest scores are less than one below, a remarkable achievement.

Table 16

Gains on Child Development Tests

Comparison of Dorchester County and National Even Start Sample

Measure	National Program Sample Data (N=84)			Dorchester County Program Data (N=13)		
	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Gain	Pretest Mean (SD)	Posttest Mean (SD)	Gain
PreSchool Inventory (PSI)	11.4 (5.9)	15.9 (6.6)	4.5	10.53 (7.32)	21.46 (7.28)	10.92
Peabody Picture Vocabulary (PPVT)	77.8 (19.5)	80.7 (16.5)	2.9	64.58 (15.38)	90.92 (10.46)	26.34

$p < .05$

EVALUATION QUESTION TWO

To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program provided additional support services or influenced families in ways which are not specifically identified as objectives of the grant?

The Even Start staff does indeed provide support services for families which are not specifically identified as objectives of the grant. Perhaps more notable is the quantity of these support services provided. Project logs are kept to monitor the support services which are provided for the Even Start families. Records are kept for telephone calls, home visits, and transportation services provided.

Telephone calls were made by the Even Start staff in order to provide assistance to the families in areas such as: contacts with collaborating agencies, setting up doctor's appointments, dealing with concerns from the schools, getting information about shots, solving problems with utility bills, and dealing with personal needs of the participants. From September 1993 through March 1994, Even Start staff made 586 such phone calls.

Home visits were made to delivery library items, to deliver medical assistance information, to discuss school concerns, to deliver messages, to help solve problems (such as damaged pipes), to help update shot records, as well as to provide home-based tutoring and activities. From September 1993 through March 1994, Even Start made 724 home visits.

Transportation services are provided for the adults and children who participate in Even Start. These services help families to do the following: go to doctor's appointments, go to the library, go to the children's schools for conferences and special programs, go to meetings or appointments at collaborating agencies, volunteer in the schools, and pick up a sick child at school. These services are in addition to providing daily transportation to and from school for the children and adults. From September 1993 through March 1994, Even Start staff provided transportation on a total of 1,1851 occasions.

The support services provided by the Even Start staff assisted the participants to

contact collaborating agencies and the schools. Table 17 lists the types of services provided by Even Start and the number of contacts from September 1993 through March 1994.

Table 17

Support Services for Even Start Families

Service Provided	Number of Contacts
Assisting Clients in Contacting:	
Social Services	89
Health Department	33
Doctors	88
Dorchester Developmental Unit	30
Public Library	19
Social Security	1
Dorchester General Hospital	2
Employment Office	1
Housing Office	3
Schools	44
(This includes school contacts which provide support in areas not identified in the project goals, for example picking up a sick child at school.)	
TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTACTS	310

The support services are not identified as specific objectives of the grant within the contexts of adult education, parenting education, or early childhood education. However, in providing these support services, the Even Start staff make it possible for the adults and children to participate in the educational programs. When pressing personal needs and concerns are met, the participants can then give their attention to the Even Start program. The provision of these services also provides a support network which encourages participants to remain in Even Start. The qualitative interviews provide many examples of in which the adults describe the support services of Even Start. Through this support, Even Start acts as an advocate for its clients in helping them to gain access to needed services.

EVALUATION QUESTION THREE

To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program met its stated objectives as perceived by the participants?

In order to determine the perceptions of the adult participants regarding their experience in the Even Start Program through qualitative measures, structured interviews were conducted during the 1993-1994 academic year. These data provide insights into benefits gained by the participating families which most likely were not captured by the quantitative evaluation instruments.

Methodology

A random sample of nine participants in the Even Start Program were interviewed. The sample included participants who have been in the program for one, two, three, four, and five years. The interviewer who was trained in ethnographic data collection became

familiar with the participants through observing daily activities in the Even Start Program. Throughout the academic year the interviewer attended morning and afternoon sessions once or twice weekly and worked as a classroom aide or tutor for students in need of individual help. The participants came to know the interviewer as a frequent visitor to the program and had regular conversations with her. Accordingly, the interviewer had established a positive rapport with the participants before the interviews began and maintained this relationship throughout the academic year.

A series of interviews using a structured interview questionnaire with opportunities for open-ended discussion was conducted and the responses were analyzed. The goal of the interviews was to gain an understanding of the Even Start Program as it is experienced and perceived by the participants. A primary purpose was to determine how the participants view the program and the changes, if any, which have occurred in themselves, their children, and their family life as they have progressed through Even Start. The questions asked focused primarily on issues related to the objectives of the Even Start program. Open ended questions allowed for participants to discuss personal information and feelings if they chose to do so.

Findings

Certain key issues emerged from these interviews, issues related to the goals of the Even Start program as well as to the personal experiences of the adults as individuals, as learners, and as parents. The interview data and analysis will be presented within the context of the three major components of the Even Start program: adult education, parenting, and early childhood education. The personal experiences and perceptions of the

participants will be included to convey a portrait of the Even Start Program through their eyes.

a. Even Start Participants as Adult Learners

When the Even Start parents describe their educational experiences prior to Even Start, they recount a history of failure. With only one exception, they dropped out of school. Their reasons for dropping out of school included: "I wasn't going to graduate anyway because I got in so much trouble," "I was pregnant," "I didn't like school," "I got kicked out," and "When I moved to Florida I was never enrolled in school so I just didn't go." Whatever the reason, they describe their educational background in terms of failure. Indeed, one participant included more than educational failure when she said, "My life let me down."

These adults returned to school, and entered Even Start, because they want an education, they want to find a good job, and they want to help their children stay in school. Although several of the adults reported that they were skeptical of returning to school again, they were bored "sitting at home" and wanted something to do. One parent said that she did not really want to go back to school, but social services made her. Although these adults made the decision to return to school, staying in school and not quitting again was another challenge. Now they stay in Even Start for three main reasons. First, they want to get a GED; second, they like Even Start; and, third, they believe that education will improve their chances for success in life.

In describing what they themselves have learned so far, they say they are proud of their accomplishments. For example,

"Well, I learned something I never thought I would learn and this is Algebra and Geometry. And computers. I thought computers were really difficult. But I found that if you just start at the beginning and take your time you can learn them."

"I finally know how to stop writing run-on sentences. I could get a sentence and write it right on. Like today, I wrote a note to my child's teacher and looked. It was awful short, but Oh God it was straight to the point."

"I learned you can do whatever you set your mind to. That's about it. I set my mind to something and want to go for it, I go for it. That's what I learned."

"I learned the basics of everything. Some things that I didn't know. I'm being honest here. Some things that I didn't know. Well, I had a lot of trouble in math, you know decimals and all that. Miss Patty has taken the time out to break it all down for us to learn. I feel proud. I learned a lot."

"I learned there are things to do better than sitting at home, for one. I learned that if you put your mind to something, you can do it."

The adults interviewed described their learning in terms of its relationship to a specific goal. The educational goal which the participants have set for themselves is clear. They want their GED. They also have a sense of a career interest beyond the GED. They expressed interests in being a dietician, a secretary, a teacher's aide, a nurse's aide, a day-care worker, a police officer, and a computer operator. Most of the adults know exactly what their strengths and weakness are in working toward the GED. They know their scores on the various sections of the test and know when they will try to pass the test. They are less clear on the process they will follow in achieving their career goals. However, they do not seem to see this as a problem. They expect to receive help in finding a job when they are ready, and that help will come from Even Start. They mentioned opportunities for employability training and some participants are already encouraged by their experiences volunteering in their career areas.

b. Even Start Participants as Parents

When one of the Even Start "Moms" was asked, "For what are you the most proud of yourself?," she responded, "The way I treat my kids. Things that I do for them. I'm just proud to be the only parent they have. They don't have everything, but I try to do my best." A statement such as this is not uncommon among the Even Start parents. Other parents said "I'm proud to be a good mother;" "I'm right there for my kids and I work with them;" and "I'm always there with my child. I'm the type of mother, if he needs something he'll get it before I get anything at all." It does appear that these individuals see themselves as good parents, and for the most part, can cite ways in which they are better parents than their own parents were. The pride these individuals take in themselves as parents comes with an understanding of the skills of parenting.

In discussing what they have learned about being a parent in Even Start, the parents mentioned skills which they have learned, such as being patient with their children, listening to them, talking to their children, and spending time with them. In their own words, this is what they have learned:

"I learned to be patient. I also learned that you don't have to beat the child; you can punish them in another way. And I learned to be calm and to have more self esteem with them and listen to them first instead of jumping on them or running to someone else's parent and jumping on them, too."

"At one time I wasn't patient. I've learned to be more patient with my two littlest ones. I work with them more because at one time I wouldn't work with them. It wasn't the time I could really put in with them. Now I give them more of my time because I figure they need it. It's easier to talk to my oldest two now since they're in the teenage world. Now I sit down and try to think of how I want to say things to them."

"I learned by improving my skills about being a parent. It made me feel more independent. How I deal with my children. I give them more time. I give them

more of my time. You know, I do activities with them."

"I learned not to spank the child. That's what I used to do. Every now and then I tap their butt. But mostly that doesn't work. So I punish them in other ways. When I punish them, they don't like it because they can't do something they want to do. They get upset with me, but I tell them I still love you anyway."

"I learned you've got to take it easy. When the child does something, you have to take time out for yourself. Occasionally, I say things, cuss, I don't just beat on my kids, but I do apologize. It's hard to calm down. Things ain't as bad as it seems. It was a lot worse than what it is. I count. Plus I talk to my children more. I didn't used to talk to them that much. Now I tell them, if they don't like what I'm doing, help me out. Tell me."

"I learned how to discipline my kids the way you're supposed to. I also learned not to hit them for everything. Now, I make them go in the bedroom, not let them watch television."

"You should take time, be understanding, patient, caring. I do a lot of that now. I love my kids, but before I did them the way my mother did me. Before I even had them, I told myself I wouldn't do that. Then I did the same things and Even Start changed me, taught me different ways to do things. I listen, things are a whole lot better with me."

"Sometimes my son who's fifteen, well, gets out of hand. I can get him set down and listen to him. I give him a chance to voice his opinion. I usually have a rap session one day out of the week. Or, if they have problems, they will come to me, tell me what's on their mind. And, I'll listen and give my opinion. So, it's been pretty good. The rap session is with all of the kids together. We sit down and I ask them has there anything that's been bothering you. If it is, tell me about it and we can work it out. It's been really successful."

Accomplishments such as these are not to be underestimated. In the early days of Even Start, the parents did not have these skills. For example, on one early field trip to the zoo, a parent brought along a belt, which she carried prominently in her hand, to keep her child in line during the trip. On a trip to a farm, parents had to be told to sit with their children on the bus and talk to their children about what they were seeing as they drove through the countryside. These parents did not talk with their children and did not possess

skills needed to resolve discipline problems other than hitting the child. The most common phrase related to discipline was, "I'm going to bust your butt." Some parents were not aware of the physical needs of their children. For example, one parent would eat her own breakfast first, and then forget that her child had not had breakfast and was hungry.

In describing their own childhood experience, some of these adults recount experiences of being hit, of moving from foster home to foster home, of running away from home, and of living with parents with substance abuse problems. Their own life experiences did not prepare them for parenting. As one parent described her own mother, she said, "She had so many kids, she barely knew what to do most of the time. Fifteen kids. She would have been a better role model if she had sat down and told us things we were going to have to do to get out of school." Another participant said, "Well, see, she [my mother] drinks real heavy. And when she gets going, I leave the house. I have to leave her. My own father got remarried and she took it out on us. For five years, I didn't live with my mother because she was in the hospital. I've been there for my kids. She put everything on me, and basically now I wouldn't do that to my kids." Other adults in the program believe that their own parents did the best that they could, often in spite of hardships such as not being able to read or write.

Parenting is more than discipline from the Even Start perspective. A goal of Even Start is to help parents recognize that they are their child's first teacher. The Even Start program stresses family literacy. In this program, parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education. This includes the education the child receives at home as well as the formal education the child receives in school. The Even Start parents have

describe the ways in which they participate in their children's education. For example, they described the following ways in which they teach their children at home.

"The reading. That's what the schools are up for--the reading. And that's the most important part. At first I would just get a book and read to my kids, then I learned there's different ways you can read and act out the books with your kids. That's the most important part I see. Yes, different ways of approaching books has been helpful to them."

"We read together. Or, if I bring a game home, we play that together. Or an activity, I always do them with them. The activity that Even Start gives. I'll go home and do it with them together. They love Monopoly and Scrabble. We read every night. The games are maybe three or four times out of a week."

"We make things. For Christmas this year we made cars and Turhanda sat down and helped make them and picked out materials and stuff. It was really nice and I enjoyed it. We made a mess but we did it."

"Sometimes we go to the movies if there's something Lavonte wants to see. Or we'll walk down to library and read a few books. At home, we wrestle. That's fun and something we enjoy. We go to the playground and they play. Mostly we talk."

"I read to them more than I used to. I didn't used to read to them that much. Now I read to them a lot. Now they want me to read them a bedtime story every night. And now I do. When they gave us numbers and stuff to do together, we do that together. She [my daughter] knows just about everything. She loves school. Some mornings I don't want to come, she'll say come on Mommy, we going to school. She wants to see the teachers."

The Even Start parents are also involved in their children's school. When this program first began, the parents were very reluctant to go to school. After all, their own experiences in school had resulted in failure. To them, the school and its teachers were intimidating. Through Even Start, these parents go to school. They have transportation to the school; they are "coached" by the Even Start staff who help them understand how to talk with their child's teacher; and, if there is a serious problem, Even Start staff members will go with them to the school and participate in the conference. Through support such as this,

the parents have become involved in their children's education, and they discuss their children's schools and teachers in the following ways:

"Whenever my son does something bad and he don't tell me, I call the teacher. We talk most every day when I pick him up from school and he don't have a sticker or something or if his lip is hanging down, I go straight to her if he doesn't tell me. She sends good stuff home, too. I help her with him. She help me with him. I sit down to talk to him about listening to the teacher. Whenever my son has a party in his classroom, I go. I carry my daughter with me."

"On conference days, yes, I go to the school. Miss Patty will take me over there sometimes. When they send a letter, I always go by. I call first. Then meet the teacher. I get along with them. They think I'm a good parent . . . I go to all of the conferences."

"I go to every conference. I don't miss any of those. They have stuff at night that we go to all the time. I deal with Chapter One stuff a lot. We talk at least three or four times a month. I have a really good relationship with the teacher. I'm able to tell them stuff about Menya that they don't know that helps them. We went to the high school for Peter Pan. Chapter One does most of the stuff like bingo. They do so much I can hardly think of it all. I go to all the activities. Miss Patty makes sure we can get there."

"Kalia's teacher, we talked often when she was having some problems, but now she's not and now she sends good notes home. The last note said Kalia was student of the week. The school has really nice teachers. They work hard to help them. I try to help them with my kids. If there is any problem or anything, I call her. She looks into it. She's very helpful. I volunteer for any programs they have. Miss Patty and them make sure I get there. For any conferences and meetings, too."

"Every time I get notice of the PTA or conferences, I go. I didn't used to take no part in them, but now I do because it's important. Now I have a healthy relationship with the teachers. They talk to me and I talk to them. When I talk to them, I find out if my child is behind in anything, then I try to help them at home. I don't expect them to change immediately, because then they would do it for me and not for themselves and will eventually quit. That's the way we do it. I tell them to do the best they can do."

"He [my child] goes to DCDC in the afternoon and I try to go up there at least once a week to see what's going on. His teacher and I talk at least once a week. We have a super relationship. I think it's very good. Every time I go up there we always talk about him and how he's improving. We work together."

"Sometimes I'll stop into the school . . . Well, I always go for conferences. I'll stop in sometimes. I feel like the teachers and I have a good relationship. If they [my children] have a problem in school, the teachers send notes home and ask me to deal with it. I talk to my sons to make sure they know what they did and then they go apologize to the teacher the next day. I go to school for conferences, bingo, sometimes in their classes. I was volunteering in other classrooms.

It is not surprising to find the Even Start parents mentioning the value they now place on education. Indeed, they see the value for themselves and for their children. They also mentioned that their participation in Even Start has helped them become role models for their children. One noted the following:

"One time my son didn't like going to school and I told him well your mom's going to school, how do you feel about that? He said, Mom, I like for you to go to school. I asked him, what makes you think that I don't like for you to go to school? I said I like for you to go to school, too. So he decided that if my mom can go to school, I can go to school. After that, I didn't have no problem getting him up in the morning no more. Before I started school, I would have handled it differently. When I would get him up to go to school, he would be like I'm sick, my stomach hurts. He would come up with various excuses why he didn't really want to be in school. He does well in school now. Before he'd just go in, sit down and look around and wouldn't say nothing."

c. Even Start Parents' Perceptions of their Child's Education

The quantitative test data for the children who participate in Even Start indicate that these children are making gains above expectations. Their parents also described the educational gains the children have made. Their analysis is not based upon test data; rather, it is based upon the accomplishments of their children and the pride they take in those accomplishments. Several of the parents noted improvement in their children's behavior and interest in reading. They mentioned that their children now ask them to read stories to them and they are willing to help with chores around the house. Frequently the parents mentioned that their children are becoming independent, able to get ready for school on their own. The

parents described the children's progress in the following ways:

"The first one [child] was not in the program when I started because she had a tracheal tube and she couldn't come here because she had special equipment. When she lost the tube, she started coming here. And now Miss Debbie and them got her in speech therapy and did alright, and then Head Start and since they got the lending library, and stuff, that helped a lot. They also get books as rewards from here and now they're doing really good in school. Because whenever we needed to go to a conference, it was taken care of. Now my daughter is getting ready to be taken out of speech therapy, she gets dismissed Thursday. It is good because she couldn't used to say banana, now she can and we can understand what she wants. They're doing real good in school. My youngest daughter is on the third grade reading level and is only in the second grade."

"Menya's reading level came up* and Kenya's spelling. She got A's and B's. The main thing is the reading and writing. My oldest can write in cursive. My youngest loves cutting up things. Their reading got better and they know how to be still. See, Menya in the first grade, the teacher was looking for her, she found her in the second grade. Basically, I see that Even Start boosted them up to want to go farther. One wants to be a nurse, the other one wants to be a librarian. It's been a role model and showed them they can be more than what they already is."

"Turhanda, she loves it. Even when she's sick, and I tell her 'Baby, you can't go to school because you're running a fever,' she'll start crying and wanting Miss Debbie. I have to tell her she can't go. Lavonte still wants to come but he's at the new school. He likes school very much."

"Well, when I started school, my oldest daughter was in ninth grade and now she's pushing to come out next year. Now that my son sees his older sister coming out, he wants to come out. He wants to come out the right way because he didn't used to like school. And that's great!"

"Since Artise has been here, he's talking more, he communicates with the other kids. Before he came here, he never talked. You would never know he was in the room. Miss Patty and them worked with him and he talks more. He knows his colors more, and numbers. I work with him at home, and he knows his name and we read to each other. The songs that they teach him, he comes home and sings. He really enjoys that."

"They like so many books. A majority of the time, they pick their own books for me to read to them. Monster Followed Me To School and The Hungry Caterpillar are favorites."

"I think they have learned a great deal. Even Start really helped them. Like when we first came, Artise wouldn't talk. Now it seems like he's full of words! He's a happy child. Sometimes he picks up words I don't like him to say, but...we work on that. I'm proud of him because he likes to work on the computer. His coordination is very good from that. He tries to teach me sometimes. They feel good about being here. I'm serious. Artise likes coming for Library day. Kalia felt real good about making student of the week."

d. Even Start Participants' Self-esteem

The adult participants in Even Start were given the opportunity to answer open-ended questions about changes in their lives and their general impressions of Even Start. Their answers were positive in terms of their satisfaction with their lives today and their experiences in Even Start. Overall, they expressed a sense of direction in their lives. They spoke with confidence about themselves as adult learners and as parents. They also mentioned the sense of "family" they have in Even Start. They mentioned working in groups and having someone to talk to. The sense of security they expressed was linked more to the Even Start staff than to their fellow students. They tended to describe themselves as individuals who value the one-to-one attention they receive in the program. Each participant mentioned individualized attention. Indeed, in light of the problems faced by these parents, they require specific help for very specific problems. In general, they noted that they had increased their sense of self-esteem and their sense of purpose, as these statements indicate:

"I've got more self esteem. More than I had before. I got kicked out of school. People look at me and say **you** got kicked out, I can't believe that. I did. Now I can see myself more up since I been in the program. So I know when I'm done with the program, I can come back in for brush up. But, I want to start my dietary classes and go on."

"It helped me to get my life in order. It helped me be responsible and better up my skills. They help me when I need it. They're supportive. When I have problems, they are there just like a family."

"I feel good about myself. I volunteer at the elementary school and I feel good about that because I got to see the level that the kids over there are at. Now I know how it's really difficult for other parents when I see how the kids are reading and writing. I see it. I know it."

"I feel good. I got in school. I've made a goal and the kids are behind me."

"I feel independent. That's what I feel. I know I can set goals for myself in the future."

"I feel good. Because I finally got my GED. I always wanted it and I kept trying and trying. A few times, I almost gave up. But I didn't and I got it. Plus I got my license last year. It's a good feeling."

"I feel good. I don't know, it's just, I've changed. I'm not the same person."

e. Even Start Participants' Perceptions of Personal Support

The adult participants described their experiences in Even Start in terms of their own education, their roles as parents, and from the perspective of their children's education. They answered open-ended questions which focused on the goals of the program. There were no "yes - no" type questions; rather, these adults were encouraged to talk about Even Start from personal experience. We wanted to see Even Start through their eyes. As they spoke about themselves and their children they presented themselves as individuals working for change in themselves and for a better life for their children. Although they spoke in personal terms, they did not take credit for their achievements. Over and over the participants say that they and their children are succeeding because of the help they are receiving from the Even Start staff. For example, they mentioned the following:

"I used to always say I can't type, then Miss Norma and Miss Patty took us right at the beginning and showed us how to turn them [computers] on and to program our name and stuff. Now I'm getting the hang of it and learning it."

"The most helpful thing is the one on one basis with Miss Patty. She's the most helpful because she'll sit right down to you. Sometimes there's a lot of people in that

class, but when you need help she'll stop what she's doing and come right to you and help you then and there."

"Miss Debbie and Miss Patty help us with certain things. Like, they get people to come in and talk to us and also get us to appointments and conferences at school. They get us to them."

"Miss Patty takes her time and explains things to me. Tells me how to go about it the easy way, because I always take the hard way of doing it. Well, mostly math that I've been working on. Things that I didn't learn in high school."

"I want to do more in the class. At first I was scared to go put things on the board, now I don't mind. If I get them wrong, I get them wrong, Miss Patty helps me."

"Miss Patty works us to death, but you don't mind learning the way she breaks things down. And she cares about us. I believe in my heart that she wants us to become something. She's not wasting time."

"I feel confident about myself. I'm successful. Ever since I've been in this program with Miss Patty telling me I can do anything. It helps me a lot. I'm happier."

"I was telling Miss Patty about this substituting job that I got today, and I told her that if it wasn't for her and all the staff, I don't think I'd be where I'm at today. Like she said and what I said, 'In order to accomplish anything, you got to help yourself first.' That's what I've been doing."

"My children like Miss Theresa and Miss Rose the best. They always ask when they get to go back and visit."

"Miss Rose and Miss Theresa do a great job with them."

"He loves Miss Rose and Miss Theresa."

"Even when she's sick, and I tell her Baby, you can't go to school because you're running a fever. She'll start crying and wanting Miss Debbie."

One of the participants who was facing surgery gives a complex description of the many problems she has faced and the solutions she has received through Even Start:

For one thing, I've got someone to talk to. You know, like about my problems, like the surgery I'm getting ready to have on my head. My sister and my mother is scared because they don't want Cambridge to do it. But I talked to Miss Debbie, she said that Cambridge would take care of you and if they need to call someone (a

specialist) in, they would. And a lot of the problems I had about my friends, Miss Debbie and Miss Patty they gave me suggestions on how to help them. And a lot of the people I brought into the program. It's been five years now and I don't have my GED yet, but I'm close. I have to take over one of the sections I already passed because the man said it would help to boost my score. The program really helped me, like I told a lot of people, you can't just go into no program and expect to get it just like that. It's not going to work. It's a lot of effort. It takes time and patience. It's done helped me a lot. Because I didn't see from all that different stuff they had, people coming in from the Crisis Center, from even the Health Department people that had come in. And then they got the people with a lot of problems, especially me. Because, at first, I didn't used to get no HIV test. I thought when you went to the doctor and they took blood they were checking for everything, but I didn't know that they wasn't checking that until those people told us that no, if you don't ask for it, they wasn't gonna do it. And I didn't know that. They helped me in that way, too. They even help with the health of my kids. When my daughter got sick, I could put down Miss Debbie's number so I could tell the school that if anything was wrong, they could call me right to the school (Even Start). Because I might not be home, just call there and they'll get the message to me. That's helped me out a whole lot. There's a lot of people in this program that they've helped a whole lot, too. They help with everything."

Discussion and Conclusions

The interviews with the adult participants in the Even Start program provide a perspective on the program through the eyes and the words of the participant themselves. It is clear that they are experiencing changes in their lives in the areas of their own education, their parenting skills, their children's education, their sense of self-esteem, and their network of support. Although many of these adults are attending Even Start as a requirement of Project Independence, not one of them suggested that she is just putting in time. These individuals have goals for themselves and their children and they believe that they will improve their lives by being a part of Even Start. Their academic achievement and their attendance rates attest to the time and effort they are contributing to the attainment of their goals.

Certain issues became clear as the participants discussed their involvement in Even

Start. First, the goals of the program have been communicated to the participants. The adults interviewed are not playing lip service to the goals of the program. They can discuss the issue of parenting in terms of the skills of parenting. They describe their relationship with their children in terms of the time they spend with their children and emphasize the patience they have learned in talking to their children and listening to them. They discuss their academic goals in terms of specific subjects, and can accurately assess their own strengths and weaknesses. They all are in contact with their children's teachers and can describe their children's academic progress. Moreover, the sense of self-esteem which they feel as a result of their involvement in Even Start is undeniable. These adults are no longer sitting home with nothing to do. They have goals and a sense that they can achieve those goals. The successes of the early participants in this Even Start program have set a pattern which those who follow believe they can also achieve.

The adults who participate in Even Start live in poverty. They are single mothers who must raise their children alone. They live in a community which is troubled by crime, violence, drugs, and extreme poverty. The statistics to describe this community show that this is one of the worst in the state. The alternative to Even Start, as they indicated, is to sit home, watch TV, go out and ride around, play at the pool hall, and talk on the telephone. As one parent said, "There aren't many places you can take a child in this town. It would be nice to take him to the park, but we don't have a park." The description these adults provide of themselves and their children getting up in the morning and going off to school together, then, coming home and doing homework together in the evening is not typical of family life in their community. Even Start offers opportunities and a lifestyle which would

otherwise be unavailable to these parents. These participants recognize the benefits of Even Start and they mentioned this many times.

This program is more than workbooks and standardized tests. There is a very personal and human element which characterizes the Dorchester County Even Start Program. One parent said, "They don't treat you like you're retarded or nothing like that." Indeed, when asked to describe Even Start to another person, the participants said, "The teachers are nice. If you need anybody to talk to, they are there to talk to you and help you;" "The teachers are nice and polite." The participants do not describe Even Start as a program, they characterize it in terms of the people--the teachers and the staff. Perhaps this personal and human element is the key to the success of the program. The words of one adult in describing her teacher may sum up the reasons that these adults and their children feel so good about themselves and Even Start: "I believe in my heart that she wants us to become something."

EVALUATION QUESTION FOUR

To what degree has the Even Start Program collaborated in a positive way with other community groups, specifically schools and other community agencies?

The Dorchester County Even Start Program staff have made extensive efforts to collaborate with community agencies. The staff regularly attend Interdepartmental Committee Meetings involving members of community agencies. The purpose of these meetings is to coordinate services and establish new approaches for cooperation in providing services to clients. During the 1993 - 1994 academic year, Even Start has expanded its coordination of efforts with community agencies. Indeed, services provided by other

agencies have replaced program losses caused by funding cuts and have enabled the Even Start Program to continue to offer a full range of services at one educational site.

The following list of agencies and the services which they have provided to Even Start and the Even Start participants attests to the extensive efforts which have been made to collaborate in a positive way with community agencies. During this program year, Even Start has successfully served as the link to the following community agencies:

Dorchester County Health Department has provided Even Start participants following:

- * Parenting workshops on a weekly basis (one hour weekly)
- * Community health nurse for health education (two and a half hours weekly)
- * Drug counseling
- * Physicals
- * WIC vouchers
- * Birth control
- * STD clinical services
- * Medical card assistance
- * AIDS presentation
- * AIDS testing

Upper Shore PIC/JTPA have assisted Even Start participants with the following:

- * Adult Education
- * Transportation
- * Driver education training
- * Ninety-hour day care training
- * Nurse's aide training
- * Summer youth programs
- * Additional training opportunities

Dorchester Developmental Unit has provided:

- * Transportation for medical appointments
- * Transportation to the Health Department and Mental Health

Social Services has assisted Even Start participants with the following:

- * Food stamp concerns

- * Appointments with case workers
- * Grant concerns
- * Project Independence meetings
- * MEAP (Maryland Energy Assistance Program)
- * Weatherization
- * Winter coats for participants
- * Child abuse/neglect workshops
- * Child care through Child Care Block Grant

The Salvation Army has assisted Even Start participants with the following:

- * Christmas baskets
- * Blankets for needy participants
- * Cribs
- * Baby supplies

The Lutheran Mission has assisted with the following:

- * Clothes for Even Start participants
- * Winter clothes
- * Canned goods and other food
- * Furniture

Project Independence has assisted Even Start with the following:

- * Fees for GED tests
- * Stipends for various activities
- * Special workshops
- * Transportation

Dorchester General Hospital has assisted Even Start with the following:

- * Provided presentation on seat belt safety
- * Provided presentation on first aid in the home
- * Assisted in medical care for participants
- * Assisted with counseling

Local Doctors have done the following:

- * Assisted in scheduling appointments
- * Presentation on children's health
- * Assisted with referrals to Mental Health

Good Shepherd's Association

- * Assisted with payment of participants' utilities

Newspapers, The Star Democrat

- * Donated papers on a daily basis for all participants

Dorchester County Public Library

- * Assisted adults in getting library cards
- * Provided regularly scheduled story time for children
- * Provided adult/child activities together
- * Provided summer story theater
- * Distributed brochures with information on Even Start
- * Provided Project Read
- * Literacy Works

Home Extension Service

- * Provided presentation on budgeting and money management
- * Provided presentation on "Nutrition and Kids"

Multi-Service Center

- * Coordinated adult education activities
- * Coordinated Project Independence activities
- * Provided career counseling
- * Provided additional adult education classes
- * Shared presentations given by guest speakers

Family Support Center

- * Provided child care for participants
- * Shared van for transportation
- * Coordinated program activities
- * Made referrals
- * Provided in-service

Head Start

- * Coordinated child care programs
- * Assisted with recruitment

- * Assisted parents in filling out forms
- * Assisted parents in getting children's physicals
- * Combined activities for parents and children shared presentations
- * Assisted in enrollment of children
- * Assisted with transportation
- * Scheduled Even Start parents to work in Head Start classrooms
- * Hired Even Start parent who had completed the ninety-hour Day Care class

St. Clair Early Childhood/Special Education Center has provided assistance with the following:

- * Speech screening
- * Hearing tests
- * ARD meetings
- * Identification of children with special needs
- * Speech therapy (twice weekly to identified children)
- * Guest speakers
- * Special programs
- * Staff training

Sandy Hill Elementary and Maple Elementary (Chapter I schools) have assisted Even Start with the following:

- * Transported parents to first grade parent interviews
- * Transported parents to parent/teacher conferences
- * Scheduled conferences for parents
- * Transported parents to Chapter I activities
- * Helped parents to become comfortable in going to their child's school
- * Made referrals to school counselors
- * Provided transportation to counseling sessions

Chapter I Program has assisted Even Start with the following:

- * Provided Parenting meetings
- * Access to school nurse
- * Summer program
- * Provided opportunity for Even Start parents to volunteer in classrooms

Local Housing Authorities and Landlords

- * Assisted participants in finding housing
- * Attended meetings with housing managers
- * Worked with landlords and participants concerning rent payments
- * Transported participants to see landlords to make payments

Mid Shore Crisis Center

- * Provided weekly counseling to some Even Start participants
- * Provided large group presentations to Even Start adults on Sexual Abuse

Holly Center

- * Scheduled dental health in-service for staff
- * Scheduled presentation on dental health for participants and children (a program shared with head start)
- * Provided individual conferences

Dorchester County Board of Education Transportation Department

- * Provided space for the program
- * Scheduled buses for Even Start field trips
- * Arranged daily transportation to and from learning center
- * Arranged daily transportation to and from St. Clair Center (kindergarten)

Cambridge City Police Department

- * Provided presentation on Halloween Safety
- * Provided presentation on Self Defense and Women
- * Provided information on Crisis Center
- * Provided presentation on drugs
- * Assist on Home Visits when necessary

Cambridge Fire Department

- * Provided presentation on fire safety for parents and children during Fire Prevention Week
- * Supplied activity packets and hats for children
- * Explained various pieces of equipment and how they are used
- * Provided Christmas Gardens (train displays)

It is not the purpose of evaluation to be burdensome to a program, nor should evaluation intrude into the smooth cooperation which exists among agencies. Contacts with representatives of the agencies which are collaborating with the Even Start Program indicate that a very positive collaborative relationship exists. Indeed, the extent of collaboration has

grown during this program year. The nature of the cooperation is congenial and the quality of the programs and services provided is excellent.

Community agencies completed an extensive survey regarding their collaboration with Even Start less than one year ago. The requirement that community agencies complete a another survey describing their cooperation with Even Start so soon after the last survey may be unnecessary and may be perceived as additional paperwork by persons whose workload is hampered by excessive paperwork. In light of the above, it does not appear necessary or beneficial to the program to conduct another survey. Accordingly, the results of the May 1993 survey are included in this evaluation.

During May of 1993 a survey was completed of 19 educational, health and human services agencies in Dorchester County. Every major agency or program that works with the Even Start population was included: the Department of Social Services, the Health Department, the Family Service Center, Project Independence, the County Library, the County Multi-Purpose Center, and the County Mental Health Clinic, and several educational programs. The results of the survey were extremely positive.

On a four-point scale of satisfaction 100% of the respondents reported that they were "Very Satisfied" with the program. In assessing the contribution of the program to the community, 95% identified the Even Start program as providing an "Essential Service to the Community;" 5% said the program was "Useful but not Essential."

These assessments are based on direct knowledge since 71% of the agencies reported daily or weekly contact with the program; 23% more reported monthly contact. The nature of the contact appears to be extensive as 72% of the respondents reported that the contact

was "Program Collaboration," while 35% "Refer Clients to Even Start" and 47% "Receive Client Referrals from Even Start." These data demonstrate a high degree of cooperation and collaboration in the utilization of community resources.

These data are illustrated in Tables 18 and 19.

Table 18
Frequency of Contact

	Percentage
Daily	18
Weekly	53
Monthly	23
Occasionally (3-4 times year)	6
(N = 19)	100

Table 19
Nature of Contact

	Percentage *
Program Collaboration	72
Refer Clients to Even Start	35
Receive Referrals from Even Start	47
Informational	47
Other	35

*Reflects multiple counts since agencies could record more than one type of contact.

In addition to these data seven of the respondents added optional comments. They

reflect the same positive response to the program. Edited for brevity and confidentiality they are:

- ** The Even Start Program in Dorchester County is exceptional. It is staffed by highly qualified professional and para professionals who are dedicated, caring individuals. This program is making a difference for those families who have needed the service which are being provided. It is the best program of its kind in which I have had the privilege of being involved.
- ** . . . The clients want to be there. The teacher/staff-student rapport in the program is excellent. The student/clients self-esteem has greatly increased since they began. The continued funding for Even Start would continue to benefit participants in Dorchester County. . .
- ** Because of Even Start's design, the program is able to work with families in an integrated way . . . I wish all programs collaborated as well as Even Start does.
- ** This is a wonderful program. The staff is always so helpful and caring . . . I wish I had a program like this to work with in all the counties (Worcester, Somerset, Wicomico and Dorchester) which I work in. If we had more programs like this we could break the chains of poverty and illiteracy.
- ** I have observed a significant change in the attitude of parents who have attended the Even Start Program. . . . I have noticed tremendous gain in the achievement of the students.
- ** Our students whose parents participate in the program feel a great sense of

pride that their parents are actively involved in our school activities . . . I wish more parents could be involved.

** . . . We at _____ believe that this program is an essential resource to the community and we will work cooperatively with them to further the program.

The survey documents the extensive interaction between the Even Start Program and the community. These data indicate that the Even Start Program has been successful in its goal to integrate its services with those of the other service providers in the county. Supporting data from agency representatives and the extensive list of agencies and services provided provide strong support for the conclusion that the Even Start Program is meeting its objective of collaborating in a positive way with other community groups, specifically schools and other community agencies.

CONCLUSION

Program evaluations customarily follow one of the traditional methodologies. Evaluators try to capture the essence of the program in human terms by the use of qualitative methods, or they attempt to reduce the program to numbers to see if statistically significant relationships exist between program elements and student performance through the use of quantitative measures. This evaluation, like the 1992 - 1993 evaluation, has brought the two approaches together to examine the Dorchester County Even Start Program. The study assessed the impact of the program on the participants and the community. The organization of the report focuses on four basic questions:

1. To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program met its objectives as

stated in the grant proposal?

2. To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program provided additional support services or influenced families in ways which are not specifically identified as objectives of the grant?
3. To what degree has the Dorchester County Even Start Program met its stated objectives as perceived by the participants?
4. How is the Even Start Program viewed by the Community, specifically by other community agencies and school personnel?

As in 1992 - 1993, the Dorchester County Even Start Program has taken on the difficult task of serving an extremely disadvantaged population, poorer and less educated than Even Start participants nationwide. The client profile is one which service providers frequently avoid because of the challenge they represent. The administration and staff of the Dorchester County Even Start Program never duck or try to avoid the challenges presented to them. Their two years of documented success are evidence of the excellence of the program and personnel. Test scores again are above the national norms. In the case of the children's PSI and PPVT-R scores, they are exceptionally above national norms. Interviews and journals reflect the human impact of the program on the participant's lives. This impact is also reflected in the response of community agencies to the program.

Staff from other programs frequently visit the site to "see how they do it." The secret is easy to see, but quite difficult to replicate. The technology is there as in many similar programs; however, this is a hands-on program where people, skills, innovation, imagination, dedication, competence, and experience are the elements to success.